

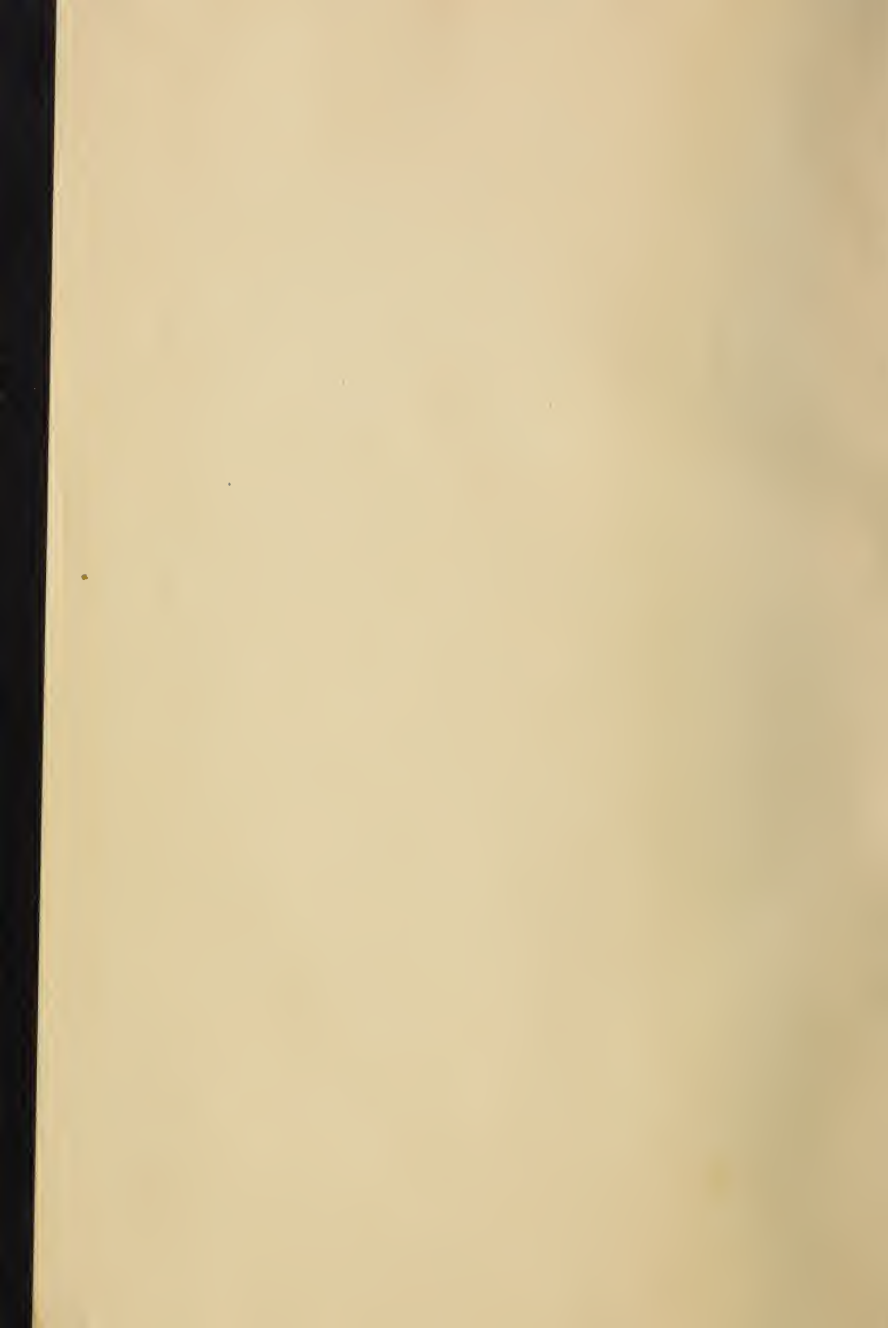


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ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY:—

IS IT OF MAN OR OF GOD?

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE DESTINY OF THE HUMAN RACE.”

“It is one of the appointed conditions of the labour of man, that in proportion to the time between the seed-sowing and the harvest is the fulness of the fruit; and that generally, therefore, the farther off we place our aim, and the less we desire to be ourselves the witnesses of what we have laboured for, the more wide and rich will be the measure of our success.”—*Ruskin.*

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ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY.

IS IT OF MAN OR OF GOD?

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE DESTINY OF THE HUMAN RACE.”

Henry Simon

“It is one of the appointed conditions of the labour of man, that in proportion to the time between the seed-sowing and the harvest is the fulness of the fruit; and that generally, therefore, the farther off we place our aim, and the less we desire to be ourselves the witnesses of what we have laboured for, the more wide and rich will be the measure of our success.”—*Ruskin*.

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TO THE READER.

FELLOW-CHRISTIAN,—Will you permit me to say, by way of Preface, that if this little book of mine is to answer any good end, it must be read in a spirit befitting the importance of the subjects on which it treats, viz., with seriousness, with candour, with Scriptural research, and with prayer. That it *may* be so read, let me, as a preliminary, commend to your serious consideration the following brief passages from Thomas à Kempis' *De Imitatione Christi*:—

“Be not influenced by the authority of the writer, his reputation for small or great skill in writing, but let the love of the pure truth lead thee to read.

“Inquire not who speaks, but attend to what is spoken; for men pass away, but the truth of the Lord endureth for ever, and God speaks to us in divers ways without respect of person.

“Great wisdom is not to be hasty in action, and not to stand too obstinately by our own opinions.

“The judgments of God are different from the judgments of men; what pleases men is often displeasing to Him.

“We generally judge of a matter according as it is pleasing or displeasing to us. For we readily lose our true judgment because of our own private likings, and are easily disturbed by the rebellion of our own private opinions.

“It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradiction, and to be misunderstood, even when we do, and intend to do, well. Such opposition will often promote humility, and keep us from vain glory.”

BLACKHEATH, *May 1, 1866.*

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ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRIMITIVE AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

M. GUIZOT, in his able lectures on the "History of Civilization in Europe," remarks : "In the *very earliest* period, the Christian society presents itself as a simple association of a common creed and common sentiments ; the first Christians united to enjoy together the same emotions and the same religious convictions. We find among them no system of determinate doctrines, no rules, no discipline, no body of magistrates."

This statement, although essentially true, probably needs a little modification. M. Guizot indeed supplies it, when he observes, a little further on, that "no society, however newly born, however weakly constituted it may be, exists without a moral power which animates and directs it. In the various Christian congregations there were men who preached, taught, and morally governed the congregation; but there was no formal magistrate, no recognized discipline: a simple association, caused by a community of creeds and sentiments, was the primitive condition of the Christian society."

We shall probably come as near to the exact truth as we can if we say that these early communities were organized and governed just to the extent that was absolutely essential to their existence as societies, *but no further*.

The great peculiarity of the PRIMITIVE CHURCH, and that which more than anything else distinguished it from the Church of later times, was *the entire absence of any organization for aggressive purposes*. No provision whatever seems to have been made by the apostles for the systematic diffusion over the earth of the truths they had taught. No indication is to be found in the sacred record that it *ever would be* the obligation of the Church at large to subdue the world to Christ.

A command had indeed been issued to THE APOSTLES, to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15—20), or, as given by St. Matthew—for this passage in Mark is omitted in many MSS.,—"Go ye therefore, and teach (disciple) all nations, baptizing them in (into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (age)" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20).

The promise, "I am with you," is evidently to be taken in connection with the declaration in the 18th verse, and may be understood thus: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth," *therefore* go forth, for *I am with you*." And if we ask in what sense the Lord would be with them, the answer is plain—to furnish them with everything that might be requisite for the accomplishment of their task.

If the latter portion of the 16th chapter of Mark (ver. 9—20) is to be accepted,—and there can be no doubt, whatever may be said regarding the want of evidence to prove it a genuine work of the evangelist, that it is an authentic fragment placed as a completion of the Gospel in very early times (see Alford),—the *presence* promised finds

its interpretation in the words, "These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark xvi. 17, 18).

Whether this explanation be the right one or not, nothing can be more certain than that, as a fact, *when they did go forth to preach*, the Lord everywhere worked with them, and "confirmed the word with signs following." In this special sense, Christ, having received all power, was assuredly *with* the first preachers of the Gospel, "even unto the end of the age."

This remarkable blending of message and miracle takes place from the very first. The Lord himself invariably accompanied His teaching by an abundance of superhuman acts, offered, among other purposes, as evidence of His authority. When He sent forth the *seventy* to preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," He bade them "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils" (Matt. x. 8); while, as if to impress them still more with the Divine character of their work, they were told to provide nothing for their journey, neither gold, nor silver, nor brass; not even a scrip or change of clothing (ver. 9, 10).

The *twelve*, but a little time before, had received from their Master "power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (ver. 1, 2).

After the resurrection, *all the disciples* were bidden "to wait for the promise" before they went forth as witnesses; *to wait until they received* "the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon them" (marg.), or as A.V., "power,

after that the Holy Ghost had come upon them" (Acts i. 8).

They *obey*, and "when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts ii. 2—4). The gift of the Holy Ghost would seem to have morally and intellectually qualified them for their task by filling them, in a supernatural manner, with light and love. The gift of tongues, which accompanied the blessing, enabled them to communicate to others the glad tidings which had been so wonderfully imparted to themselves. No room is left for doubt either as to the character or object of this latter donation, since we are told that its *immediate* effect was that strangers from all parts of the world now heard the word of truth; every man in his own tongue *hearing them speak* "in his own language" (ver. 5, 6).

Nor was this special power for evangelizing confined to those who received it direct from the Lord. The apostles were endowed with ability to communicate it. For when Peter and John go down to Samaria, they do what Philip could not do,—they confer the Holy Ghost on his converts, so that these too work miracles. This is evident from the desire of Simon to obtain the gift for money (Acts viii. 5—24).

On *the Gentiles* also, to the astonishment of Peter, the same gifts descend. "They of the circumcision which believed were astonished," for "they heard them (the Gen-

tile converts) *speak with tongues*, and magnify God" (Acts x. 46). Peter himself states soon afterwards to the other apostles, that "the Holy Ghost fell on them, *as on us at the beginning*" (Acts xi. 15).

At a later period this power descends on *Paul* in such abundance that "from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts xix. 12).

The *disciples of Apollos* receive from *Paul* a like blessing; for after he "had laid his hands upon them," they too "spake with tongues and prophesied."

The believers "which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about *Stephen*," and who are said to have gone "as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the Word," were in all probability similarly qualified; for it is by no means likely that in this—or, indeed, in any respect—the converts in Jerusalem would be behind the Gentiles.

Such was the energy of healing in *Peter*, that on one occasion it is said, "They brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of *Peter* passing by might overshadow some of them: . . . and they were healed every one" (Acts v. 15, 16).

What precise charism *Timothy* had is not stated; but as he is distinctly told to "stir up the gift of God" which was in him "by the putting on" of St. Paul's "hands," there can be no doubt that he, too, was *specially* endowed. There is not, in short, so far as appears from the evangelic history, a single instance of any person being commissioned to "preach the Gospel," in the sense of evangelizing, without his having received from God some special gift or

power for the accomplishment of the work. The command and the promise appear invariably to go together. The work is never entrusted to any man without his being gifted with special power to fulfil it.

Are we, then, to conclude that the particular commission now under notice, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," was given exclusively to the apostles, and to those who should receive from them, or immediately from the Holy Spirit, gifts of tongues or of healing,—miraculous powers, the exercise of which unquestionably arrested attention, and enabled the preacher to communicate intelligibly and with authority, in any language, the good news he had to impart ?

I think we must. For whatever obligation may rest upon any of us—minister or layman—to spread the glad tidings of redemption,—and I should be the last to deny such an obligation,—it seems clear enough that *this particular command*, as given by our Lord, cannot be separated from the promise by which it was accompanied. It seems as plain as anything can be, that these first preachers had, all of them, *a special gift of language*, which enabled them to communicate with men of other tongues ; *a wondrous power to heal*, which at once commanded attention, and furnished adequate evidence of the speaker's right to be heard ; and *an ability to express*, in a simple manner and with a loving heart, the truth as it is in Jesus. In this sense Christ was with these men, in a special and peculiar manner, to the end of that age—and no longer.

Before that time, if St. Paul is to be credited, the work was done,—that is to say, the seed of Divine truth, which, until the coming of Christ, had been deposited exclusively in Judea, was sown in all the world.

But the end of the dispensation was then *very near*.

The apostle's words to the Colossians, written probably only about five years before the destruction of Jerusalem, are, in this relation, singular and striking. Speaking of the hope which was laid up for them in heaven, he says, "Which is come unto you, *as it is in all the world.*" And again, "Be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which ye have heard, and *which was preached* to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. i. 6, 23). By "*was preached*" he means, not merely *is being preached*, but *has been actually*, as an accomplished fact, preached. (So Dr. Brown and Dr. Faussett.)

What we have to notice, then, is, that *here* the work of evangelization, *as commanded to be undertaken*, is spoken of as *done*. And not here only. St. Paul repeats the statement in the Epistle to the Romans, when, speaking of the impossibility of men believing in one of whom they have not heard, he adds, "But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound (that of the preachers of the Gospel) went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom. x. 18).

St. John, writing his epistles probably very near the close of the century, does not give a single hint as to the duty of completing the testimony, but tells the Churches "it is the last time," or, literally, the last hour,—the evidence of which is the manifestation of "many antichrists" (1 John ii. 18). The whole world, he says, "lieth in wickedness," notwithstanding the preaching in all lands. What, then, is to be done? How is it to be subdued to the Redeemer? His answer is a striking one. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. *The world passeth away*, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

The work had been accomplished by the precise means

originally provided,—a gift of tongues and miracles of healing; but *without organization*; by the few, and not by any united effort; by disinterested labourers, acting for the most part on their own individual responsibility, and *unassisted*.

It is, indeed, not a little remarkable that while contributions are frequently asked by the Apostle Paul for “poor saints,” and while *the right of some*, under given conditions, to live by the Gospel, to receive carnal things in exchange for spiritual things, is, as a principle, implied and sustained, nowhere have we the slightest hint of any such claim having ever been made with reference to the general diffusion of the truth among the nations. From the Thessalonians, it is said, “sounded out” the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place their “faith to God was spread abroad;” but the context explains *in what way* this was done. “Ye were *ensamples* to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. i. 7, 8). And again, “We ourselves glory in you in the Churches of God for *your patience and faith* in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure” (2 Thess. i. 4).

The evangelization of the world, as accomplished in apostolic times, was evidently, from first to last, an individual work, a miraculous work, a witnessing work.

Further, nothing can be plainer than that the words of the Lord were understood by the apostles to mean, *not* that the Gospel must be preached to every child of Adam—an absolute impossibility under the circumstances, a thing which never *has* been, nor ever *can* be done, under the present dispensation,—but that the glad tidings should be declared *in every nation* “for a witness” (Matt. xxiv. 14), the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile being now broken down, and all the world made one in Christ.

But if this be the fact, it necessarily follows that the salvation of all men cannot be dependent upon their hearing of Christ, and believing upon Him in this life ; for, as the apostle says, " How *can* they hear without a preacher ? "

Nor is there—and this should be carefully noted—a single indication—even a *hint*—that would lead us to suppose that either the apostles or the first Christians *thought* that the salvation of the world depended, *in any degree*, on their fidelity, effort, or prayers. Hence it is that, in the apostolic age, no trace is to be found of that exaggerated idea of Christian responsibility which always induces what may properly be called *the persecuting spirit*. The words of the Lord to the two apostles, " Ye know not what spirit ye are of " (Luke ix. 55), and the rebuke to Peter, " Put up thy sword," were then fresh in their minds. It was left for theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, in later days to discover that the massacre of the Canaanites and Elijah's slaughter of the priests of Baal justified the atrocities of persecutors. The first Christians had not, indeed, *the power* to persecute, but neither had they the will. The doctrine of Divine sovereignty—*then* never separated from the Divine love—was firmly believed,—*so* firmly, that painful anxiety or acute distress relative to the future lot of unconverted friends or relatives was, so far as we can judge from what is written, absolutely unknown.

Paul's anxiety is exclusively manifested either for the Jews, as the chosen of God, who were casting away their birthright, or for those who had been converted under his teaching, that they might be built up and perfected. For the first he could wish himself " accursed," notwithstanding his belief in their ultimate salvation (Rom. ix. 1—5; xi. 26); for the last he undergoes, as it were, the pains of a second " travail " (Gal. iv. 19). He has no such anxiety about the

Gentile world, although he is their chief apostle. It is for "weak" brethren, not for the world at large, that he is "made all things to all men" (1 Cor. ix. 22). The world was probably as great a mystery to him as it is to us; but it was not a *painful* mystery; he only saw in it the hidden riches of the glory of God (Col. i. 27). Nay, strange as it may seem, he never appears to suppose for a moment that either he or his brethren were, in any sense whatever, called of God to be *instrumentally* the saviours of the world, by converting it to Christ. On the contrary, he always speaks of himself as sent only in witness, to take a people *out of* a world which was itself very soon to pass away.

Further, he evidently thinks it more than possible that he may live to see what most men regard as the end of the world; for he writes, "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and *remain* unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (go before) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then *we which are alive and remain* shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. iv. 15—18).

True it is, that even in this very epistle he tells the Thessalonians that "the times and the seasons" are unknown; that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night,"—suddenly and unexpectedly; and in a second letter he specially warns them not to be soon "shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (1 Thess. v. 1, 2; 2 Ep. ii. 2); but he does not alter his teaching, or withdraw anything he has said, or bid them

look for comfort to anything else but the coming of the Lord. To the troubled he still says, "Rest with us,"—repose on the same blessed hope that we do: "When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels," the wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. i. 7—10.)

So closes the apostolic age. Explain it as we may, it is unquestionable that the first Christians lived and died fully expecting that the Lord would return *immediately* and take unto Himself the kingdom. One scarcely sees indeed how they *could* have believed anything else. Had not all the prophets spoken of the *triumph* of Christ as if it were to take place *immediately* after His humiliation? as if these two thoughts, "a man of sorrows," and "Emmanuel, God with us,"—thoughts which it must have been impossible for them to combine or harmonize, would nevertheless be one? as if the Crucifixion and the Coronation of Messiah were, so to speak, to touch each other?

Again, had not John heard the Lord say to Peter regarding himself, "If I will that he tarry till I come what is that to thee?" And did not this at least *imply* that the coming referred to *might* possibly take place during his lifetime? Did not his greatly prolonged days seem to encourage such an expectation? Further, had not Paul and Peter, and all the apostles, with one consent presented this "coming" as the great motive to watchfulness and to holiness? So far then from our finding cause to marvel at the prevalence of a belief in the immediate return of the Lord, the wonder would have been had any other hope been prominent in their minds.

How shall we explain this state of things? Were the first Christians *deluded* by apostolic men, who were themselves, in this matter, deluded of God? Impossible! Should then the fact that such an error was admitted shake our confidence in the infallibility of inspiration? Certainly not. But it may teach us an important lesson, viz., that inspiration, like everything else that God gives to man, is *probationary*,—that it is to us what we are to it; that if we approach it in a one-sided spirit,—if we fail to view it as a whole, on all sides and in all its parts,—if we prefer one portion to another, or neglect and pass over what may not be quite clear to us, or what we may find difficult to harmonize with other and more direct utterances, *we shall be misled*.

Now this seems to have been the error both of the apostles and their converts in this matter, regarding which no direct revelation had been given. The voice of prophecy—*always the last to be listened to, even by the Church*—had spoken of delay; and difficult as it might be for them to combine what must sometimes have appeared conflicting in the Divine testimony, it surely became them both to listen and to ponder.

The parable of the Lord regarding the seed of the Word, its rapid and unperceived growth by night and by day, bringing forth, like the earth, *fruit of itself*, and followed in the natural order of things by harvest (Mark iv. 26—29), might, taken alone, be supposed to support the idea that the end of all things was at hand; but the fact that it had been accompanied by another parable, in which the same truth is represented under a different aspect,—one in which the smallest of seeds becomes a great tree, shooting out great branches, so that the fowls of the air (birds of prey) lodge under the shadow of it, pointed to a different issue (ver. 30—32.)

The world in which this seed was scattered had further been likened by the same Divine teacher to a field, in which, amid the good seed, tares had been sown by an enemy, and both were to grow together until the harvest. Again, the doctrine of the kingdom had been compared to "leaven" (an evil thing—Matt. xvi. 6; Mark viii. 15; 1 Cor. v. 6—8; Gal. v. 9), which was to be "*hidden until the whole* was leavened." Again, it had been compared to a net, enclosing bad as well as good fish, to be separated the one from the other only at the end of the world. *All these images shadowed forth extension, delay, and corruption.* These things, however, they do not appear at that time to have fully seen.

But there was much more inspired truth in their possession calculated to correct their erroneous anticipations than the parables just referred to. After the apostles had one by one departed, there remained in their hands a series of predictions relating to the future, *all dark*, all speaking of great moral decay, of an apostasy, and of a reign of antichrist,—all, therefore, indicating lapse of time before the end. Let us simply enumerate them in their chronological order as uttered by Paul, by Peter, by James, by Jude, and by John:—

2 Thess. ii. 3, 7—"That day shall not come, unless there come a falling away first;" "The mystery of iniquity doth already work."

2 Cor. ii. 17—"For we are not *as many* (already the evil had begun to work), which corrupt the word;" or rather, as Archbishop Trenchard reads it, "*make a traffic of the word.*"

Acts xx. 29—"For I know that after my departure shall grievous (or rather, *burdensome*) wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."

Col. ii. 8—"Beware lest any man spoil you," or, as it should be, "*make booty of you*," "through philosophy" (pretended theology).

Jude 11—"Woe unto them!" for "they have run greedily *after the error of Balaam for reward*."

2 Pet. ii. 3—"Through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you."

1 Tim. vi. 5—"Withdraw thyself" from men of "corrupt minds," who suppose that "gain is godliness;" or rather, according to Dr. Trench, that "*godliness is lucre,—a means of getting gain*."

2 Tim. iv. 3—"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts (or, fancies) shall they *heap to themselves teachers*, having itching ears,"—of course *paying for the luxury*.

Rev. xviii. 10—13—"That great city," which "makes merchandise *of the bodies and souls of men*."

Under these shadows the primitive age of the Church gradually disappears from view, and a new era begins, the era of the mystery of iniquity,—*the exceptional and parenthetical period* in which we are still living, although probably near its close.

CHAPTER II.

THE POST-APOSTOLIC AND MEDIÆVAL CHURCH.

WE have now to consider the great change which came over the Church, in relation both to its beliefs and methods of action, after the death of the last of the apostles.

I have already said I regard this period as the beginning of a new era,—the era of “the mystery of iniquity,” the exceptional and parenthetical period in which we are still living, although probably near its close. I call this period *parenthetical*, because I consider that while it lasts the dispensation of the Spirit, properly so called, is in great measure *suspended*.*

I do not of course mean that during these eighteen centuries the Spirit of God has withdrawn from the earth, for this would be far indeed from the truth. As a reprover, convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, the Holy Spirit is always amongst us. Neither

* The entire history of the Church, since the days of the apostles, confirms this view. The errors and superstitions of ancient Christianity; the crimes of ecclesiastics; the miseries of the Inquisition; the no less brutal superstitions and cruelties of Puritanism towards persons suspected of witchcraft; the exaltation of satanic power; the absence of all tenderness in religion; ever present terror; the moral element in Christianity superseded by the dogmatic; doctrine taking the place of rectitude; faith determined neither by Scripture nor by reason, but by the intellectual influences of the time; improvement produced only by advancing rationalism; past errors unatoned, and existing falsities still cherished and fought for,—all united render it almost a mockery to speak of the last 1,800 years as the period of the dispensation of the Spirit.

do I imagine that the promised "well of water," which was to spring up in the heart of the believer "unto everlasting life" (John iv. 14), has ever failed; for "the Spirit" still "beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God" (Rom. viii. 16).

What I mean to say is, that whatever occasioned the first age of the Church to be entitled, in a peculiar sense, the age or dispensation of the Spirit, belongs to it no longer—has not belonged to it since or soon after the last of the apostles died. *In the sense* involved in the prophecy of Joel,—in the sense understood in apostolic days,—whatever may be the reason, the Holy Spirit is not now given—has not been given for centuries. And yet the promise was neither to that generation nor to their children, but to as many as the Lord our God should call (Acts ii. 39).

The individual believer may not be essentially poorer now than he was then, but the Church as a whole unquestionably is. We may attempt to conceal the loss we have sustained by depreciating supernatural power, by maintaining that neither gifts of tongues nor of healing are necessary now either as evidences of the truth of Christianity or as a Divine witness to the reality of conversion (Acts x. 47); we may, as imaginative persons sometimes have done, try to persuade ourselves that the weakness of our faith alone hinders the reappearance of these ancient endowments; we may, in our self-satisfaction, say that we are now *above* these things; that prophecies have failed, and tongues have ceased, because that which is perfect has come; but the fact remains untouched,—we have no longer the "power" that the first Christians seem so largely to have exercised.

I do not say that there was any connection between these supernatural gifts and the expectation of an equally

supernatural appearance of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven, but it is certain that both passed away about the same time, and were succeeded by an almost unbounded faith in human instrumentality; by a deep and settled conviction that instead of a personal and immediate "coming" of Christ, it was the purpose of God, by the sanctification of human talent, and by the ordinary operations of the Spirit, eventually and speedily to subdue the world to the Redeemer.

Nor were indications wanting that a well-directed effort in that direction might be effectual. The old paganism was obviously *effete*, and had become to multitudes nothing better than a worn-out superstition. No philosophy of life and of man presented itself for acceptance as fitted to take the place of that which was ready to die. Now was the time and the hour for Christianity to bring forward its claim to a hearing. Only let faith be exercised, and the Crucified would take possession of a throne which, if not yet vacant, was sure to be, before very long.

But to accomplish such a work, *organized power was essential*. So, step by step, it was sought and obtained.

With this belief in a great mission, came the persuasion that there was *no salvation* for any man *out of the Church*; that eternity and its issues were all *suspended* on belief or unbelief of its teaching; that the word of Christ was *pledged* to effect the subjection of the earth to the saints; that consequently the most solemn obligation rested on every man who would save souls from hell, to further this work by the unsparing dedication of his property, by his unceasing prayers, and by unremitted personal effort. And since so great a conquest could obviously only be accomplished by fierce strife with the existing paganism, by unparalleled endurance, by eloquence, by argument, by

discipline, and by united action, it was, as I have already stated, regarded as *absolutely necessary* that organization should be both prompt and perfect; that power should be centralized; that persecution should be dared; and that the men who manifested most courage, most self-denial, most talent for government, should become, by virtue of these qualities, bishops or elders in the Church. If to these gifts were added, as was frequently the case, an *ascetic piety*, and *great learning*, acquired in the existing schools of philosophy, no reasonable doubt, it was thought, could be entertained that such a man was specially called of God to rule.

Nor can it be denied that most of these early bishops were indeed CHRISTIAN HEROES, rejoicing to die for the flocks over which they presided. And if, as a matter of inevitable necessity, *power* by this process soon became concentrated in few hands; if the ardent, the courageous, and, owing to human infirmity, the ambitious, under these circumstances grasped the reins as fast as they were dropped by their more indolent or timid brethren; and if, in process of time, they sought to strengthen their position by gathering around the office all the influence that learning, oratory, and priestly claims could bring to bear on an ignorant and superstitious population, the result may excite sorrow, but not surprise.

But leaders alone were not sufficient. With the passing away of the expectation of a second advent of Christ, heart-felt trust in Him *as a Person*, and apart from any set of doctrines *about Him*, had largely passed away too. Faith had now come to be regarded, not so much as a *simple belief* in the person and passion of the Lord, as the definite acceptance of certain truths relating to His incarnation and sacrifice. These, however, could only be gathered from

fragmentary records scattered abroad, and which, when collected together, were found to consist rather of A BODY OF FACTS from which doctrines might be deduced, than any systematic summary of things needful to be believed. It was necessary, therefore, that truth should be *systematized*; that doctrine should be drawn from doctrine; that a Catechism, a Creed, and a Liturgy should be prepared; for *without these* it seemed impossible to make any impression on the careless and superstitious world. *So a Theology was framed.*

And not without a very plausible apology for so doing. ‘How different,’ they would say to themselves and to each other, ‘is the condition of these semi-pagans, by whom we are surrounded, to that of the first disciples at Jerusalem! *They* were instructed; *these* are ignorant. *The one thing requisite* to make the converts at Pentecost trustful and happy Christians, was the purification of their hearts from old prejudices,—from Jewish pride and exclusiveness,—from carnal notions about their exaltation as a people above all other nations. Their intellects were already exercised on the Old Testament Scriptures; they were an instructed people,—perhaps, on the whole, better educated than any other nation upon earth. A new *heart* was all they needed, and, this vouchsafed, everything was accomplished. They were then prepared to advance in the Divine life with very little human help indeed, for they were not unaccustomed to any of the means by which that life was to be quickened and sustained.

‘Far otherwise is it with these poor heathen! What *they* need is mental illumination, a moral training, and constant guidance. But how simple, how dogmatic, how authoritative must be the instruction imparted, if it is to be at all adapted to their condition! Without books,—

without the ability to read if they had them,—dependent therefore altogether on human teaching, and with intellects oftentimes so dull and unimpressible that they can be reached only through symbol and picture, what can be so suitable *to them* as agencies of the same character, although not precisely of the same form, as those by and through which God himself trained Israel, and brought them out of Egyptian darkness into the position and privileges of His chosen people?

‘The gift of the Comforter, like the gift of tongues, was, to some extent at least, Pentecostal and temporary; the gift of the Holy Spirit, as bestowed upon patriarchs and prophets, as embodied in the Church, and as manifested in the teachings of authorized ministers, is surely *the only permanent form* in which, from the very necessities of the case, it can be communicated to all nations.

‘How absurd, then, to suppose that these wretched idolaters can ever be made judges of truth! At the priest’s lips they must seek knowledge. How vain to imagine that *in them* the Divine life can ever be sustained apart from that great spiritual organization which now occupies the place, and has inherited the authority, of the Apostles! Let them “hear the Church;” let them “obey those who have the rule” over them; let them learn that all spiritual influence flows from Christ to His Church, and, *through the teachings of that Church alone*, is diffused over the whole world.’

Thus it was that the history of the Church became the history, “not of an isolated community, or of isolated individuals, but of an organized society,” soon to be incorporated with the political systems of the world. Thus it was that it gradually took the form of *a centralized and aggressive body*, having for this purpose called into existence a systematic

theology adapted to all classes; a discipline under which individualism was discouraged, and submission enforced; finally a clergy, distinct from the people, with a jurisdiction of their own, and provided with all the means of extending and consolidating conquest.

It is impossible to contemplate such a state of things, involving all that we now know it did, without asking whether the course they adopted was a right one? And I know not how we can arrive at a true answer, except by observing results; for of all human undertakings it may safely be asserted, after full time has been given for the development of principles, "*By their fruits shall ye know them.*"

Now what were the results, what the fruits of the course these "Fathers" adopted? The historian shall portray them:—

As the village, the town, the city, or the province became in outward form and profession Christian, "practical heathenism retired, to work more silently and imperceptibly into the Christian system;" Christian morality became more and more divorced from Christian faith; heresy soon became almost the only crime; and in the desire to make an impression on the general tone and character of society, exaggerations of all kinds sprang into existence; religion became a mere engine of terror; and the moral elevation of each individual by truths which, rightly imparted, promote energy and self-reliance,—fill a man with noble thoughts and masculine virtues, making him at once a worshipper of Christ, and a follower of all righteousness,—was lost sight of in the eager desire to bring all mankind within the pale of the Church, however debasing or debilitating the process by which it might be accomplished

Nor should it be forgotten that the persecuting spirit displayed by the Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries was *the consequence of theological development*. "The writer who was destined to consolidate the whole system of persecution, to furnish the arguments of all its later defenders, and to give to it the sanction of a name that long silenced every pleading of mercy, and became the glory and the watchword of every persecutor, was unquestionably Augustine, on whom more than on any other theologian—more, perhaps, even than on Dominic and Innocent—rests the responsibility of this fearful curse.

"He made it his mission to map out theology with inflexible precision, to develop its principles to their full consequences, and to co-ordinate its various parts into one authoritative and systematic whole. He was the most stanch and enthusiastic defender of all those doctrines that grow out of the habits of mind that lead to persecution. For a time he shrank from and even condemned it, but he soon perceived in it the necessary consequence of his principles. He recanted his condemnation; he flung his whole genius into the cause; he recurred to it again and again, and he became the framer and the representative of the theology of intolerance. It was merciful, he contended, to punish heretics even by death, if this could save them or others from the eternal suffering that awaited the unconverted."

Yes! "it is in itself evident, and it is abundantly proved by history, that the virulence theologians will display towards those who differ from them, will *depend chiefly* on the degree in which the dogmatic side of their system is developed. In the first century there was, properly speaking, scarcely any theology—no system of elaborate dogmas authoritatively imposed upon the conscience. Neither the

character of the union of two natures in Christ, nor the doctrine of the Atonement, had been determined with precision, and *the whole stress of religious sentiment was directed towards the worship of a moral ideal, and the cultivation of moral qualities.* But in the fourth century men were mainly occupied with innumerable subtle and minute questions of theology, to which they attributed a transcendent importance, and which in a great measure diverted their minds from moral considerations.”* Hence their low moral state, their crimes, their notion that they might excusably do almost anything for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Such was the end of a great, and, to human eye, successful attempt to subdue the world to Christ by means of an ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY.

* Lecky: “History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe.”

CHAPTER III.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

THE inheritor of the Ecclesiastical System, and its modern representative, is the Roman Catholic Church of the nineteenth century. Its fundamental principle still is, the subjection of the world to the Church. For this end it claims catholicity, enforces unity, and insists upon its possession of "Divine certainty and Divine discernment." The conception is a magnificent one; dazzling to the imaginative, captivating to the devout, and courting the confidence of all who long to find rest in the bosom of infallibility.

That which has been said of Jesuitism is equally true of modern Romanism in all its branches. "It intends nothing that is partial or circumscribed; its very purport is universality; its idol is a vast abstract idea—a beautiful conception of spiritual domination, which shall at length supplant all other dominations, and insure peace and order upon the earth."

Nor is such a scheme to be regarded as "a mere plot, hatched by the few against the rights and liberties of the many. So to think of it would be the dictate of a shallow philosophy." It is but a provision for that "which minds of a certain class—and they are not few—yearn to be supplied with, and which they must somewhere find ready to their use."

The ancient Church, says a distinguished modern Romanist, had to encounter organizations so powerful that "nothing short of an organization incomparably more multifarious in its appliances, more persevering, more cohesive, or rather so closely knitted together that each of its parts depends upon while it strengthens the rest,—discipline being inseparably united with doctrine, and both with the innermost thoughts and intents of the heart,—could have withstood the force by which it has been threatened."

This organization Rome professes still to maintain, it having (so its advocates affirm), in accordance with the purposes of God, ultimately developed into a government which embraces the world, and claims the sovereigns thereof for subjects. The Church, it is said, "must not only be independent of all other societies and bodies of men; it must demand a legitimate *control* over their actions in many particulars."

Again, the Church, if not the creator, is the controller of conscience. "The State ought to say" to the Church,—*"You have the right to control consciences. It is your duty so to regulate them as that men shall aid and not thwart me in my efforts for the benefit of all."* To submit the Church to the State is "to place the teacher under the jurisdiction of the taught." All civil freedom is *dependent on the Church*. The law of God and the law of the Church are co-extensive. "Power therefore is an essential attribute of this society, and since it is no society without Christ, the power it possesses is truly Divine.*"

The question therefore again arises, Is *the principle* on which these assumptions proceed,—viz., that the Church's

* Essays read at the English branch of the Academy of Rome, and recently published, under the editorial superintendence of Dr. Manning.

obligation to Christ involves the conversion of the world, *so far at least as such a work can be accomplished by human instrumentality*,—a true one? Is it sustained by Scripture? In other words, Is it of God, or of man?

I am not asking whether Popery is of God, or whether any part of the particular organization by which that system is sustained is of Divine authority; but whether, apart from all its supposed corruptions, and apart too from its pretensions to override alike both secular government and national liberty,—apart altogether from *the means* it may employ to effect its object,—the Romish Church is justified in assuming that its great work on earth is the conversion of men; that the eternal happiness or misery of each individual hangs upon the acceptance or rejection, I will not say of Romanism, but of that element of truth which, amid much superstition, certainly lies embedded in its teachings,—that, in short, *out of the Church*, widen that term as we may, there is no salvation?

If it be so, it is certainly not easy to decide *where* the line is to be drawn, or who may venture to say to her ministers, “Hitherto shall ye go, but no further.” Time is as nothing when compared with eternity. Secular interests are not worth a thought when placed in comparison with those that are spiritual. All human authority fades and disappears the moment it is confronted with that which is Divine. The one and only question worth a thought is, Has God in very deed called His Church to undertake in His name, and by His help, the conversion of the world? Whether Rome be *His* Church, and whether its particular course of conduct may be either wise or right, is a distinct thing. On this point a Protestant writer can scarcely be expected to form a favourable judgment.

Again, the question is not whether any or what amount

of *good* has been accomplished either by the ancient Church or by its legitimate successor.

There can be no doubt whatever that the fall of Paganism was a blessing, bringing in its train Christian civilization, humane sentiments, improved laws, and the advancement of society morally and intellectually, as well as materially. Lord Macaulay has well said that "the conversion of the whole people (of India) to the worst form that Christianity ever wore in the darkest ages, would be a happy event."

So also must it freely be admitted, that modern Romanism is a blessing when compared with the atheistic infidelity to which it has frequently been opposed. Nor should it be forgotten, that while, on the one hand, all the phenomena of Protestant religious "revivals" recur from time to time in that Church, and produce results very similar in kind, and quite as permanent in duration, as among ourselves; so, on the other hand, in the ordinary course of things, domestic virtue, devout feeling, self-denying service, and eminent piety, often distinguish members of that apostate communion.

The effects produced by the preaching of Savonarola are *in degree* repeated year by year under the appeals of devout monks in every country of Europe. Now, as in the olden time, it not unfrequently happens, that under strong religious excitement children associate themselves for religious purposes; idle diversions are discountenanced; vice, drunkenness, sensuality largely disappear, and are kept down often for years afterwards; schools and shops are closed when sermons are preached; the sound of hymns replaces that of licentious songs; places of amusement are deserted, and churches are thronged. It is undeniable that to this day effects of this character are not

unfrequently produced by the organized efforts of the priests and friars of the Church of Rome.

But are we *therefore* to conclude that God *endorses* their proceedings; that His Holy Spirit is poured out upon them; that the Church of Rome is, after all, Christ's representative upon earth; or that her organization thereby receives the Divine sanction? Do we not still say,—*and rightly*,—that if her saints were to come out of her, and if the ecclesiastical arrangements so much vaunted were to be broken up, the world would be benefited and God honoured?

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHURCHES OF THE REFORMATION.

LET us now proceed a step further, and inquire whether the Churches of the Reformation, either National or Congregational, Established or Free, have had committed *to them* the conversion of the world?

Of course they all believe that this is the chief end of their existence. *For this*, although in different fashion and under different forms of government, they organize. *For this* they build churches, and erect colleges, and endow chairs, and collect pew-rents to sustain preachers, and form societies, and establish newspapers, and edit magazines, and circulate tracts, and stir earth with eloquence, and besiege Heaven with prayers. For this they live. In this cause their noblest and best are willing to die. And all this simply because they believe that Christ has called them to the work of evangelizing the world,—that the command, “Preach the Gospel to every creature,” means, preach it to every child of Adam, and that therefore it is as much addressed to them as it was to the apostles.

To this extent modern Protestant Churches have *inherited* the opinions of “the Fathers.” And not to this extent only. For with the sense of obligation to convert, they have also inherited, and held in honour, that great system of deductive theology which Augustine and others so ably expounded and defended. The one is probably

inseparable from the other. A preacher without a definite theology; a Church without articles, expressed or understood; a society without a discipline so fashioned as to secure the adherence of its members to a given order of thought, whether embodied in a written creed or not, may be very primitive and very apostolic, but it is certainly, to modern eyes, very absurd. Such a condition of things would be, without doubt, totally incompatible with modern arrangements; fatal to all denominational existence; unlike anything we can conceive of in connection with churches, chapels, ministers, and missions; adverse, in short, to the action of that complex machinery by which we now seek to build up each other's faith, and to extend the knowledge of God, whether at home or abroad.

That the formation of National Churches in lieu of the one Catholic Church long paralyzed the missionary spirit is notorious; but it did so from political rather than religious causes: and the revival, half a century ago, of systematic efforts to convey the Gospel to the ignorant, was but a natural, and, so far, a *healthy* reaction from the cold and dead formality which national religion had engendered. Whether this was *the best* form that the new spiritual life could have taken; whether the movement did not proceed to some extent on erroneous views; whether it did not attempt to blend conflicting elements—elements incapable of being united,—are questions the answer to which will depend very much on the view taken of the general line of thought we are now pursuing.

Dean Alford,—and in this particular he, without doubt, utters the convictions of almost the entire religious world,—observes, when commenting on the original command given in Matthew xxviii. 19,—“Inasmuch as the then living disciples *could not teach all nations*, does the Lord (here)

found *the office* of preacher in His Church, with all that belongs to it,—the duties of the *minister*, the *school teacher*, the *Scripture reader*. The command is to THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH, to be performed, in the nature of things, by her ministers and teachers, the manner of appointing which is not here prescribed.”

Is the learned expositor *right* in this conclusion? *That* is the question.

That he is *wrong* in imagining that later ages can accomplish *more* than apostolic zeal aided by miracle could effect I am sure: for literally it is quite as impossible to preach the Gospel to every creature now as ever it was. But this is not the point. I am not asking whether the Church is called upon to perform impossibilities; but whether a commission has been given to her to convert the world *to the extent that may seem to her possible*? Whether for this end she is called upon to organize her forces; to gather contributions; to scatter her expositions of Divine truth in the form of tracts broadcast over the whole world; to form societies; to sustain missionaries, whether at home or abroad; to endow or otherwise support professional teachers; and when she has done this, or at least much of it, for above half a century, with *comparatively* very small results, *to refuse to inquire* whether she has done right or wrong, content to explain all apparent failure by reference to the Divine sovereignty?

I say *comparatively* small results, because I am by no means insensible to the amount of good that *has* actually been done; nor am I inclined to doubt for a moment that every *honest* attempt to benefit others, whether in accordance with the Divine mind or not—however mixed with human infirmity or sin—*does* in a degree, and by a law invariably acting, although its operation cannot always be

traced by mortals, obtain a blessing. I believe that in all cases and under all conditions,—

“The quality of mercy is twice blessed ;
It blesses him that gives, and him that takes.”

But this is no proof whatever that the particular form adopted for its conveyance is *the* one God specially approves or signally sanctions.

Before, therefore, attempting to answer the question now before us, viz., whether the Church has or has not in her hands a Divine commission to convert the world? one or two matters commonly mixed up with it must be disentangled.

It may, then, first be allowed, without really touching the point at issue, that National Churches, whatever evils they may occasion, are national blessings, so far as everything relating to the civilization and Christianizing of a country is concerned. That man must be deeply prejudiced who cannot allow that, *viewed in this aspect*, it is greatly to the advantage of a State, greatly to the advantage of the poor, greatly promotive of morality, decency, and social refinement, that an educated man, not dependent on the people for support, should reside in every parish, and bring the influence of his culture to bear on the ignorant and rude population by which he is often surrounded. As the channel of much beneficence; as the link that frequently connects the higher with the lower ranks of society; as a visitor among the poor; as a religious teacher, however slight may be his capacity; as a friend at the bedside of the sick and the dying; as a supporter of schools and other agencies for the improvement of those around him, there can be no doubt on the mind of any unprejudiced man that, allowing for human defects, a parochial clergyman,

with his assistants, *may be*, and in thousands of cases *actually is*, one of the greatest blessings by which a country can be enriched.

It may further be allowed, and with equal pleasure, that the labours of the various bodies of seceders from the Church of England are, in like manner, fraught with untold good; that their frequently lowly places of worship; their sometimes ruder teaching; their intense activity; their keen sympathy with the life by which they are surrounded; their charities innumerable; their popular oratory; their social characteristics; their self-government; and the stand they have often made against tyranny and oppression,—all combine to render them invaluable supplements to other efforts, and enable them to supply, what no other agency is so well fitted to do, *safety valves* for what might otherwise prove explosive forces, and a *breakwater* against the flood of lawlessness which every now and then rises in countries where thought and action are alike free.

It is necessary, I say, if we would arrive at truth, to disentangle these things from the question really under consideration, viz., Whether God has committed to His Church the work of evangelizing the world? Whether He has, *in any sense whatever*, made her *instrumentally* the Intercessor for the earth, or the Saviour of the community at large? Whether, in short, He has made human salvation to depend on her delivery of the message with which she is supposed to be entrusted?

It may to many persons seem a strange thing for a believing man, with the Bible in his hand, *to affirm*, nay, a wild and monstrous supposition *to conceive*, that He has not done so. Yet I hold it to be the fact; a fact as certain as that God has accepted the Gentiles, without requiring them

to pass through Judaism ; and if my reader has patience to listen, I will simply state my reasons for coming to so unusual a conclusion.

They are these :—

(1.) Apart from the command given to the apostles, “Preach the Gospel to every creature,”—a command which, as I have shown, was accompanied by the gift of *special power* for the accomplishment of the work, and by this superhuman aid *fulfilled* in apostolic days,—I can find no exhortation in Scripture calculated to lead to the belief that the duty of evangelizing the world *by aggressive action* really rests upon us.

(2.) I find no promise of Divine aid connected with such an undertaking ; no evidence that it has, since the apostolic age, ever been specially vouchsafed ; no reason to believe that more real good would not have been done had Christians, instead of being mainly distinguishable from others by their missionary zeal, been chiefly known by their separation from the world, manifested in an elevation of thought and feeling *capable* of being recognized by its effects ; by a higher standard of conduct than can be seen elsewhere ; by greater integrity ; deeper humility ; sweeter tempers ; a calmer mind ; more obvious meekness and gentleness ; a noticeable deadness to the ordinary ambitions of life ; a wider charity, and a more enlarged beneficence. Chiefly by an *open arm*, ever ready to receive and welcome any, of whatever rank, and apart from all sectarian considerations, who, by the grace of God, and by the magnetic force of *appreciable excellence*, may be attracted towards the truth, rather than by that continual entreaty and appeal which has for so long been regarded as all-powerful.

Such, at least, seems to have been the practice of the apostles. The jailer cries, "What must I do to be saved?" before the word is preached to him. The eunuch entreats teaching before he receives it. Cornelius sends for Peter, not Peter for Cornelius. The Jewish proselytes at Antioch, in Pisidia, *follow* Paul for further instruction, not he them. Everywhere a *prepared people* is supposed. Everywhere the work of the Holy Spirit *precedes* that of the human messenger. It is because God says to Paul, "I have much people in this city," that the devoted servant remains in Corinth "a year and six months teaching the word of God among them." It is only because he is placed on his defence before Felix, Festus, or Agrippa, that he utters a word in the hearing of any one of them. At Athens, stirred as his spirit was by its idolatry, he is content to dispute in the market with such individuals only as were more or less inquiring, and therefore disposed to listen; and it is not till they *bring him* to Areopagus, and *ask him* to tell them what this new doctrine is, that he addresses them from Mars Hill; and when some mock, and others say they wish to hear him at another time, he simply departs from among them.

Even in relation to bodily healing, whether performed by Christ or by His apostles, *desire* for the benefit, and a certain amount of faith in the power of the person applied to, are *prerequisites*. They go, unsent for, *to none*; all *come* to them. Not an instance is to be found of a Divine messenger pressing his exhortations upon any unwilling hearer, *except in the case of Jews, who recognized, in the messages of their prophets, the voice of God*, however depraved they might be, or however unwilling to be thwarted or rebuked.

(3.) I am unable to perceive that a life of outward activity, taking the form of incessant preaching and exhorting, whether from the pulpit or from house to house, is so beneficial to a man's own soul as is commonly taken for granted. On the contrary, I believe it to be a life of peculiar peril, unfavourable to the deeper forms of the spiritual life; singularly adverse to the love of truth *for its own sake*; and when unsupported by meditation and prayer, frequently productive of formality, and, strange as it may seem, of a self-satisfied, hard, and unloving spirit.

(4.) I notice that all the figures of Scripture which set forth the relation of the Church to the world, represent her as occupying a *passive* rather than an active position. She is to be "a city set on a hill," to be seen as a refuge, but not as an assailant. She is to be a "candle," not "placed under a bushel, but on a candlestick," that she may "give light to all that are in the house,"—a figure representing domestic and social virtue rather than public notoriety. Christians, in like manner, are to be the "lights of the world" and the "salt of the earth,"—they are to exercise a purifying influence, but of a very tranquil, silent—I had almost said unperceived—kind.

Again, they are to be "meek," not militant; sufferers rather than combatants. No figure implying warfare as their duty is to be found in Scripture, *excepting such as refer to victories, by faith, over inward evil and over persecution, by steadfastness and patience; over all temptation, in short, by the power of the Holy Ghost.* The armour of God is altogether defensive. It is not adapted for attack. The "good soldier of Jesus Christ" is he who bears hardness. The victor is the man who endures unto the end.

In the message to the Seven Churches from Him "who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks," there is not a single reference to anything beyond what would be called, in our noisy age, *mere passive virtues*. Not a single commendation is bestowed which implies *activity*, in the sense of aggressive attack on the evil in the world by public exhortation or appeal. The praise given and the reward promised is for patience; for rejection of evil; for testing truth; for labouring in good without fainting; for overcoming self and sin, temptation and persecution; for faithfulness unto death; for holding fast the name of the Redeemer; for not denying Christ under the influence of the fear of man; for love and loving service; for good works; for keeping the Lord's works unto the end (Rev. ii. and iii.).

The *condemnation* pronounced, and all accompanying threats of punishment, are for the loss of first love; for falling away; for licentiousness; for conformity to idolatrous customs; for sanctioning immoral teaching; for having a name to live while really dead; for unwatchfulness; for self-conceit; for ignorance; for self-dependence and estrangement from God. The *exhortation* is, "Be zealous, therefore, and *repent*."

The *blessings* promised comprise immortality,—eating of "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God;" a "crown of life;" freedom from the power of "the second death;" hidden manna; the "white stone;" power over the nations—to "rule them with a rod of iron;" the "morning star;" clothing in "white raiment;" retention in "the book of life;" recognition before "the Father and before His angels;" the reverential submission ("worship") of all enemies; deliverance from the hour of the great "temptation that is to try them that dwell upon the earth:"

being made "a pillar in the temple of God;" finally, to sit on the throne of Christ, even as He is set down with the Father on His throne. Not a word indicates triumph in the conversion of the world. Not a syllable is pronounced likely to encourage such an attempt. The woes of Scripture are only on the man who causes weak ones to stumble, who *hinders* any in their approach to Christ or in their growth in godliness.

(5.) I observe that among "the fruits of the Spirit" zeal for the conversion of men is not mentioned. The fruits are—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. v. 22, 23). Again, "the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth; proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (Ephes. v. 9, 10). The "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God," is nonconformity to the world,—transformation of mind,—improvement of gifts bestowed,—ministering *to the Church*,—teaching,—exhorting *one another*,—giving,—ruling,—showing mercy,—loving without dissimulation,—abhorring evil,—cleaving to good,—exercising kindly affections and brotherly love,—in honour *preferring one another*,—being industrious in business,—fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,—rejoicing in hope,—patient in tribulation,—instant in prayer,—benevolent,—hospitable,—blessing even persecutors,—cursing none,—sympathizing with others' joy or sorrow,—compassionate,—condescending,—without revenge,—just,—peaceable,—leaving vengeance to God,—feeding enemies,—overcoming evil with good,—submitting to all lawful authority,—free from debt,—loving others as ourselves, with all that this involves,—walking as children of the light,—bearing with weak brethren,—pitiful,—courteous,—eschewing evil,

—doing good,—seeking peace and following after it; in short, the cultivation and practice of “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest (or, venerable), whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,” says the apostle, “*think on these things*” (Rom. xii, xiii.; Phil. iv. 8; 1 Pet. iii. 8—17).

Such is the inspired catalogue of Christian graces; and it is certainly not a little remarkable that, on the supposition of Christ having committed to His Church the conversion of the world, *not a word should be said* respecting the right performance of such a duty. One cannot but feel that if any modern divine were required to draw up such a list of Christian excellences, he,—unless he submitted himself to apostolic precedent,—would leave out not a few that are here made prominent, and insert many that are here omitted.

(6.) I notice that the *present purpose* of God, so far as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, seems rather to be *the perfecting* of the few than the general improvement of the many. Everything seems to me to point in that direction. That the Gospel is *ultimately* to benefit the many is clear enough; but at present,—judging from the experience of the last 1,800 years,—its power as a *renewing* element seems confined to the few.

The teaching of the Lord himself while He was on earth shadows forth such an intention;—“Unto *you*,” He says to the disciples, “*it is given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not under-

stand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark iv. 11, 12). "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. xiii. 12). The *true recipient* of the doctrine is like a man who, having found hidden treasure, goes and sells all that he has to become possessed of it (ver. 44—46). The beneficence of the Lord seems unlimited to those who desire His *healing* blessing; but His *instructions* were reserved for the few who were in a state of mind to benefit by them. And yet His heart is full of love to the multitudes, of whom He always speaks tenderly as "sheep without a shepherd."

(7.) I observe, *as a fact in history*, that,—as in earlier days, so still,—just in proportion as Christianity extends through human agency, *it deteriorates*; it loses, as if by a sort of necessity, much of its superhuman and Divine character, and becomes more earthly in its aims and end.

While Christians are *few* in any given country, they commonly *feel* themselves to be "pilgrims and strangers,"—dead to the world, alive only to Christ. When they become *many* new views arise. Their hope and aim then is to *improve* the world in which they find themselves *a power*; to render it a fit abode for the righteous; to regard the Gospel as intended for its adornment. They now live not so much to bear a witness for God, as to benefit the race; they become the men of progress; and they have, for the most part, unbounded faith in the earth's future, as one of increasing piety and prosperity. I am not now saying whether they are right or wrong in taking this view of their duty. I speak only of the fact.

For the same reason, and in the same way, it comes to pass that wherever Christians are *few*, and without any immediate prospect of increase, the perfecting of the individual character, and the attainment of likeness to Christ, becomes the *prime object* of life. When they become *many*, the carrying out of schemes for the *extension* of the faith, or the application of the great principles embodied in Christianity to the necessities of society, somewhat supercedes more personal considerations. This is generally regarded as *an advance* in godliness, since it certainly leads believers to think less of themselves and more of others.

Again, while Christians are *few*, TRUTH is naturally regarded as *the first thing* to be sought—its attainment the great object of a good man's ambition ; when they become *many*, it is commonly assumed that man's chief end is to glorify God rather by practising and propagating what he has inherited. In this case TRUTH is ordinarily held to be actually in possession—at least, all *important* truth ; for now a distinction is drawn between certain elementary truths which are regarded as fundamental,—their reception necessary to a man's salvation, and other truths supposed either to be *less clearly* revealed, or else *unessential* to the full development of the Christian life and character. The *few* may believe that *everything* God has revealed in Scripture, whether distinctly stated or but dimly indicated, whether embodied in history or veiled in prophecy, has its object and end, and is therefore to be diligently searched out ; the *few* may be willing to wait hopefully for new light, and to dig assiduously and patiently, whether in the light or in the dark, for hidden treasure ; the *many* are always irritated by what they regard as a waste of time and energy in unpractical speculations ; they protest loudly and with one

accord against any unsettlement of received opinions; they do not believe that Scripture is in any sense *progressive*; they regard its revelations as long since made plain, our only remaining duty being to enforce the views we hold so dear, on all men. The religion of such persons is therefore mainly, if not exclusively, objective and active; and since intense outward activity rarely consists with a spirit of meditative inquiry, they are too often content *to do*, hoping that the blessing they seek to convey to others will not fail to fall upon their own souls.

The *many* always seek to act with others—for human life is in the main a social thing; but the study of Scripture, like all other study when earnest and absorbing, tends to segregate rather than to unite. "Passion is adhesive; a common interest cements;" but the pursuit of truth *for its own sake*, as a rule, keeps men apart from the crowd, and this "just in proportion as the inquirer learns, by a more or less keen insight,—by more or less of sorrowful experience,—that *his* object is not the object of the men around him, even when they leave the things of time and sense, and consult the lively oracles, and worship God."

Further, a spirit of inquiry, if cultivated, supposes the possession of at least *some* time for quiet thought, and, as its accompaniment, a strong sense of individual responsibility. But a life of incessant activity, even for God, commonly *brings with it* a supposed inability to find leisure for much personal investigation, and *before long actually produces* so strong a moral and intellectual distaste for such employment, that it may, without impropriety, be called *moral inability* to pursue it. Such persons, therefore,—pressed as they say they are by overwhelming demands on every side,—naturally exalt and lean upon professional teaching; rely much on the power of money and machinery

as instruments of good ; and in the higher life, too often relegate what have been termed "counsels of perfection" to other worlds or happier times.

Nor should such a course be regarded as either strange or inconsistent in any one who believes that the religion of Christ, in its higher as well as lower aspects, is *intended* for nations as well as for individuals ; for there are undoubtedly injunctions in the Sermon on the Mount which, however admirable in themselves, and however practicable by one who is content to give up this world for the next, cannot be carried out *as they stand, and without compromise*, by any great organized community, representing, as modern governments do, *all classes* in society. They *suppose* a theocracy.

As a necessary consequence therefore, when any nation, *as such*, adopts Christianity, and professes to govern itself by the law of Christ, compromise is inevitable, and the conventionalisms of a *Christianized* community necessarily take the place of the sterner and more rigid demands of the Master. But what the nation does *as an organized whole* is seldom surpassed by the individuals of which it is composed. The all but inevitable result, under such conditions, is *the general lowering, in practical life*, of a standard regarded as too high for the world as it is, although the original ideal of right as laid down in "the Book" may still be taught, and, in the abstract, revered. Nothing is more certain than that every one of us is likely to become "better or worse morally, to advance or to retrograde socially, according to the standard of life which prevails around us—a standard which we are each individually helping to depress or to raise." The difficulty of rising above this level is felt by every one who aspires after a truly noble and spiritual life.

(8.) I observe that, as a rule, the mingling of the godly and the ungodly in public worship,* for the purpose of promoting at one and the same time the growth of the believer and the conversion of the sinner, has an injurious influence on each of these classes. The *former* is wearied by incessant repetitions; injured by the habitual ignoring, in these mixed assemblies, of truths which, however needful for him, are not adapted to a general congregation; and often *led to doubt* his true position as a renewed and saved man, by finding himself perpetually confounded, both in public prayer and preaching, with those who are altogether unspiritual. The *latter*, exaggerating the importance of what are termed “the ordinances of religion;” led habitually to unite in the singing of hymns which are, in *his* lips, altogether unreal and inappropriate; expected to support the ministry by his contributions, and to give his money in aid of missions both at home and abroad, soon comes to regard religion as largely consisting in such services, and is naturally led, in the observance of Sunday, in the reading of the Bible, in formal prayer, and sometimes in the reception of what are termed “sacraments,” to conclude—and especially when his general conduct is regulated by the same conventional standard as the more religious—that he himself enjoys all that is really intended by regeneration.

Outward difference between the Church and the world, in such a state of things, cannot exist. One man may be living to God, and another entirely to himself, but the Searcher of hearts alone knows which is which. *The witness of the Church is lost.* Yet the world has not become

* As I shall have occasion in a later chapter to refer more at length to this admixture, it is only needful to say *here* that I do not advocate any attempt at a separation of classes by man.

the Church, nor has the difference between the one and the other been, in the slightest degree, in essential matters, diminished.

(9.) I think I see reason to believe that the *vulgarizing* of sacred things, by indiscriminate speech ; by the circulation of religious tracts among all classes ; by the creation of a religious literature,—sometimes merely sensational, commonly exaggerated, sometimes sectarian, sometimes merely philanthropic, and sometimes half political : the *commonizing* of exercises which pertain only to the renewed heart, by public advertisements of prayer meetings ; by placards in the streets announcing special seasons of devotion ; by noise and religious excitement ; by platform speeches and popular addresses ; and by a thousand well-meant but injudicious devices to arrest the careless, or to quicken the half-hearted, has a very decided tendency to take off *the tender bloom* from piety ; to lessen *the delicacy of touch* with which all Divine things should be handled ; to *lower spirituality* of thought and feeling ; to cheapen and coarsen things which were never intended to be thus dealt with ; to pander to that spiritual pride and restless vanity to which man is ever prone ; to cast pearls before swine ; and to alter the character of godliness itself, by making it to consist, *not* as the Lord did, of self-sacrifice, but in a rather pleasurable religious excitement : lastly, and worst of all, to expose Holy Scripture, and all the duties faith in it involves, to the criticism of men whose moral state disqualifies them from comprehending the true character either of “the Book” or the believer.

For these, as well as for many other reasons, I am led very seriously to doubt whether Christ has ever called His

Church to the work it has undertaken; whether our various religious machinery—our churches and chapels, our ministry and missions, our religious societies and religious publications—nearly all that goes to constitute the religious world of the day, is not rather of man than of God.

I do not either say or think that no good has been effected by these agencies. I do not pretend to decide what would have been now the actual state of society had they never been called into existence. I do not feel that in searching for the right path, and seeking to ascertain the will of God, I have anything to do with that question. I do not wish to hide, either from myself or others, that God often uses the most imperfect instruments, and sometimes the most corrupt organizations; that Popery as well as Protestantism has its bright side; that national as well as voluntary churches have each achieved the ends for which they were adapted; that every sect and party without exception has, in its degree, helped to elevate public opinion, to improve the condition of humanity, to dignify life, to repress crime, and to promote virtue.

All this may be allowed, and yet it may be indubitably true, that the idea of Christ as embodied in the New Testament would have been more largely realized in broader distinctions between the righteous and the wicked, in a more disinterested piety, and therefore on the whole in happier results, had the Church *done* less, and *been* more; had vital Christianity never associated itself with professional life; had it been kept, as a thing apart, from all fellowship with worldly ease, status, rank, ambition, from *everything* in short that the unrenewed man as such can either desire, understand, or estimate.

With less of the earthly in our religion there would then have been more of the heavenly. If miracles had been

needed, miracles would without doubt then have been vouchsafed. Earth would, in some of its aspects, certainly have been a diviner thing than it now is, and hell at least would not have been *in alliance* with professedly Christian ministers in persecuting the conscientious or in shedding the blood of the saints. Atheism or Paganism might still have claimed their victims; but the horrors of the Inquisition, and the enormities of what are known in history as “religious wars,” would have found no place in the annals of the world. Stumbling-blocks without end would have been taken out of the way of the weak and the feeble; doctrine would not have superseded life; nor deeds of shame have been canonized when done in the service of the Church.

All these things, and much more than can here be recited, are the fruits of ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY; the natural if not necessary consequences of the belief that a man’s salvation hangs upon his attention to, or neglect of, the teachings of ecclesiastics; or if not so, upon his acceptance or otherwise of given doctrines, put before him, at the best, very imperfectly, and unsustained by any evidence he is capable of appreciating; often contradicted by the lives of those who enforce them; and sometimes by the very Book from which they are professedly deduced.

The result of the whole appears in Christendom *as it is*,—Papal, Greek, or Protestant; in the heathen world, as it remains after centuries of Romish aggression, sealed by the blood of many martyrs, and after at least sixty years of earnest and self-denying effort on the part of the purest and most evangelical believers that the modern world has ever seen; in Mohammedanism all but untouched; in infidelity ruling over nearly all the cultivated minds of Europe; and in the intelligent artisan class everywhere

alienated alike from religion and its professors. Literature meanwhile is Christianized, but not Christian ; science and philosophy stand aloof in scorn ; aboriginal nations, after years of untiring labour for their conversion, hopelessly disappear before the white man ; superstitions the most abject revive in the very midst of us ; violence and oppression are as rampant as ever ; civilized communities are still ravaged by war, and stained by innumerable crimes ; the elements of disorder are scattered on every hand, and Cæsarism is the degrading hope of millions.

Such is the world, and such the *so-called* Church of Christ, after ages of effort on the part of every variety of ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER V.

REMONSTRANCE AND REPLY.

I AM quite aware that the reader, long before he has got to the end of my reasons for doubting the aggressive commission of the Church, will have become sadly impatient to remind me that Scripture clearly identifies growth in grace with endeavours to benefit others ; that the promise is, he that watereth others shall himself be watered also ; that the voice of inspiration cries, "Curse ye Meroz ; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof ; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

I shall further be told that God says to the prophet, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel : therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die ; and thou givest him not warning, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity ; but *his blood will I require at thine hand* ;" that the great apostle of the Gentiles exclaims, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : *we pray you in Christ's stead*, be ye reconciled to God ;" that God himself has not only commanded both prayer and effort for the world's conversion, but has actually promised that He will pour out an abundant blessing on those who seek it : "Prove me now herewith, saith

the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it;" finally, that the parable of the marriage supper definitely lays down the obligation that ever presses upon us, to go out into "the highways and hedges," and "compel" sinners "to come in."

It will probably be added, that although Judaism has passed away, there is the same necessity now as ever, that *an order* of men should be entrusted with the conduct of Divine worship; that the schools of the prophets among the Jews correspond to modern colleges for clergy; that the synagogue, if not a positive model for later forms of Church order, was nevertheless the pattern of the primitive congregations; and that this method of conducting the public services of the sanctuary was sanctioned alike by Christ and by the apostles.

It *may be* that, rising into something like indignation, my interrogator will ask if common sense is to be abandoned? if Churches are to be broken up? and if, after dismissing our congregations, we are simply to sit down and passively wait for the coming of the Lord? If this course be disclaimed, he will probably cry, 'What good on earth then can arise from discussing a question which in that case has no practical bearing? Tell us plainly what you would have us to do, and what you would desire us to leave undone.'

This is precisely the point at which I wish to arrive.

Before, however, answering the questions put, allow me to protest against a use of Scripture which, however common, is altogether unjustifiable. The text, "He that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. xi. 25), does not really refer to any spiritual service whatever. It simply

expresses a fact of life, borne out by all experience, that he who helps others in their need will himself find help in the hour of his own necessity. The man whose soul shall be "like a watered garden" is he who deals his bread to the hungry, and satisfies "the afflicted soul" (Isa. lviii. 11). The curse on Meroz is Deborah's antithesis to her blessing on Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for betraying Sisera. What has *that* to do with the preaching of the Gospel?

The warning to Ezekiel is against an *unfaithfulness* which, whether arising from fear or any other cause, might lead him to keep back the message God *directly and specially* sent by him to his rebellious countrymen.

An "ambassador" is one who receives his credentials direct from the sovereign. "The office, like its designation, is not definite nor permanent, but *pro re nata* merely." A modern preacher, however devoted he may be, is no more a "watchman," or an "ambassador" for Christ, than he is one of His apostles: he is not even a "shepherd."*

The promise of blessing, on which so much stress is laid, is simply *no promise at all*. We have only to open our Bibles, and to read carefully the chapter in the prophecy of Malachi from which the words quoted are taken, to perceive that the prophet is charging the people with robbing God, by keeping back the tithes and offerings

* In Scripture the term "shepherd" is applied in a metaphorical sense to *Cyrus* (Isa. xlv. 8); to *princes and rulers* generally (Jer. ii. 8; xii. 10; xxiii. 1; xxv. 34; Ezek. xxxiv. 2); to *God* (Psa. xxiii. 1); to *Christ* (John x. 11; 1 Pet. ii. 25); to *Apostles* (John xxi. 16); and to *Elders* who teach *authoritatively*, and in that character demand *submission* (1 Pet. v. 2-4; Heb. xiii. 17). The spiritual shepherd in Scripture always unites government with teaching, the primary idea being that of *authoritative rule*. A minister of the Gospel occupies no such position.

which, by the law of Moses, they were bound to pay. He calls upon them to repent of this sin, and to bring in what was due; promising that if they do so God will send upon them large and unexpected temporal prosperity. The text has *no reference whatever* to prayer or spiritual work of any kind.

Nor is the parable of the marriage supper at all more in point, since it obviously refers not to the general preaching of the Gospel, but to the ingathering of the elect.* Of the six passages of Scripture quoted, each in turn apparently regarded as conclusive, there is not one that has really, when honestly interpreted, any bearing on the matter. Scripture, when accommodated in this way, has no authority whatever. *So used*, the words, however inspired, are not of God.

Of the "schools of the prophets" we know little, and that little is anything but favourable either to their faithfulness or efficiency. We have no evidence that the order was of Divine appointment, and we have sad proof that the persons thus trained were, *as a rule*, whether men or women (Ezek. xiii. 17, 18), found in opposition to the true prophet. They were the preachers of "smooth things,"—the builders who "daubed" with "untempered mortar,"—the hirelings who were willing to please either prince or people, as the case might be, for "a piece of bread" (Ezek. xiii. 2—16; Jer. xxvii. 9—16; xiv. 14; xxiii. 21; xxix. 8, 9). Let this, however, be as it may, there is

* The entertainment is not provided or intended for *all* the king's subjects. When the first invited have refused to come, the servants are indeed commissioned to bring in *indiscriminately* any they may find, but only till the house is filled,—till the wedding is furnished with guests. From the time of the rejection of the Jews to the present moment, the marriage supper of the Lamb *has waited*, because God has not yet "accomplished the number of His elect." (See Dr. Maitland's "Eruvin.")

nothing whatever to show that these persons were ever intended to be models for a New Testament ministry.

As to synagogue worship, there can be no doubt that it *did* furnish, in degree at least, and as distinguished from the service of the temple, something like a copy for the assemblies of the first Christians. But the points in which it did so are precisely those which *do not* belong to modern places of worship, since these are not courts of law, with punishments, as the synagogues were; nor yet courts of arbitration, as the first Christian assemblies probably were (1 Cor. vi. 1—7); still less places for open ministry, as *both* were (Acts xiii. 15; 1 Cor. xiv. 26; Heb. x. 25).

But why should either prophet or synagogue be brought forward to illustrate the obligations of the Church in relation to the world? The idea involved in Judaism was unquestionably that of *limitation*, as opposed to universality. For above two thousand years this chosen nation, miraculously sustained and divinely governed, receives no commission to extend, by anything like missionary effort, the knowledge of the true God. Generations come and go; judges, kings, priests arise and disappear, without even attempting, by any active or aggressive proceedings, to shed a ray of light on the nations outside the promised land. No prophet passes the narrow limit of this "Switzerland of the East," unless, indeed, it be, as in the case of Jonah, for the purpose of denunciation. No attempt is made to radiate truth from this little centre. No missionary spirit is either excited or developed through its entire history. On the contrary, everything is arranged to *prevent* intercourse with the heathen, even on the part of those who, at different periods, for commercial or other purposes, settled in foreign lands.

And yet *as a fact*, the Jews *did*, especially in the

brighter periods of their history, exercise a very powerful influence for good on the surrounding nations; a *much more powerful* influence than has ever been exercised over heathendom by any or all of the missions—Roman Catholic or Protestant—that have sprung into existence in modern times.

The state of Nineveh is an evidence of this. Jonah prophesies, and instead of killing him, as might have been expected, king and people with one accord humble themselves before the Lord,—proof in itself that a great amount of light must have streamed in from Judea. Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon bowing before Daniel as a prophet of God is a second instance. Darius is a third. Ahasuerus is a fourth. Cyrus is a fifth. In all these cases, be it observed, no aggressive action had been taken. Daniel seems to have been a faithful servant to the king of Babylon, but nothing more. Neither Mordecai nor Esther had attempted to shake the existing idolatry. It is *their fidelity* to their God, so far as they themselves were concerned; their purity of life; their trustworthiness, and nothing else, that does the work.

The illumination that, in any case, fell either upon monarchs or their subjects, reached them like the beams of the sun; it penetrated by its own power, it was seen by its own light, it carried its own evidence with it.

At a later period there is every reason to suppose that the deepest and best thoughts of the more enlightened philosophers of antiquity, whether of Greece or Rome, drew their inspiration from the writings of this despised and secluded people. Portions of their literature, whether *historical*, as the Pentateuch,—*poetical*, as the Psalms,—*prophetic*, as the denunciations of the seers,—or *didactic*, as the Proverbs of Solomon, although never circulated among

the heathen, fell from time to time into the hands of inquirers, and often found a welcome among men who felt the darkness in which they were involved.

The very existence of "proselytes of the gate" proves that no *barrier* was set up to stop the way of any heathen man seeking after a knowledge of the light of life, and it is clear that none could lawfully exclude from Jewish *privileges* any who sought in the appointed way to share their advantages. Reprobation finds no place in the counsels of our God.

The fact that through all the stages of the Israelitish history a body of persons, *not of their race*, but holding the same faith, appears by their side, is very suggestive. Every institution seems to presuppose and provide for the incorporation of strangers. The prophets plead their cause along with that of the widow and the fatherless, and one of them at least looks forward with joy to the time when they shall be in all respects equal to Israel (Ezek. xlvi. 22, compared with Psa. lxxxvii. and Ephes. ii. 19). Of the proselytes of later days, we read in the New Testament that one builds a synagogue (Luke vii. 5), that others came up to the great feasts (Acts ii. 10), and that they all shared with the Jew in religious worship (Acts xiii. 42; xvii. 4; xviii. 7). Nor is it a little singular that the only active effort to win men to Judaism that we hear of, is made by persons from whom all that was most true and living had departed: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell (gehenna) than yourselves" (Matt. xxiii. 15).

Nothing can be clearer than that the power of the chosen people to do good to others was to be derived, almost

exclusively, *from the elevation of their own characters.* With this end in view,—the personal sanctification of the Jew himself,—all the institutions of the Mosaic economy were framed. They were neither intended nor adapted for transplantation to other soils. The child of Abraham, like his great ancestor, was to live and die under laws which to him were often burdensome, and to other men must have appeared utterly ridiculous. Just in proportion to his obedience to those laws was he scorned by the heathen. He was despised *precisely to the extent* in which, under the fear of God, he submitted to Divine ordinances *binding on him*, but not obligatory on others.

Yet the responsibility of the Jew in relation to mankind at large was both real and pressing. He was to be a witness for truth amid surrounding idolatry and sin. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the noblest and best of the race as being, in fact, “a great cloud of witnesses” to all generations. But this was to be accomplished mainly by example. No command, I repeat, is given to the Israelite to propagate by preaching the truth he possesses; he is to *live* it. His power for good is to be derived almost exclusively from the elevation of his character. He is to be an *attractive*, but not an aggressive missionary.

I wonder whether it will be possible to induce Christian men in these days *seriously to inquire* whether, in this particular, *the principle* of the earlier dispensation *is* indeed, as has generally been supposed, different from that on which our own rests? whether, in short, we are justified in concluding, as we seem to do, that the two economies embody, so to speak, two *different thoughts* of God?

It is certainly worthy of note that truth never made so much progress among the heathen as when it was altogether unaggressive, and *had to be sought for* by those

who wanted it. It is surely equally remarkable that in modern times truth has never taken so strong a hold on a pagan people, never spread so rapidly, never endured such cruel persecution, never produced such nobility of character, as it has done in an instance where Providence has *forced* us, after heralding the Gospel, to withdraw from its further propagation,—where, under circumstances to human eye the most unfavourable, it has struck deepest root. I refer, of course, to the island of Madagascar. There, *in the absence of any action from without* for above a quarter of a century, without a missionary, without any organized Church, without any European teacher, without any expenditure of money, the seed, but slightly scattered, has sprung up, no man knoweth how, and brought forth fruit “thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold.”

I have no wish to draw any invidious contrasts, but one cannot fail, in comparing what has taken place in that island with the results of long-continued and most unsparing effort in New Zealand, in the Society Islands, in India, or in any part whatever of the missionary field, to come to the conclusion, that as man disappears from the scene, God manifests Himself; that the holy and self-denying life of a few natives, and especially when accompanied by the patient endurance of suffering, has been the most powerful of all preaching; that God apparently *will not* give any extended blessing to schemes which, whatever may be professed, seek to plant among pagan tribes our own theologies, our own forms of Church order, our own blunders, and our own imperfect and artificial Christian life. Happy will it be for Madagascar if she does not in a while become as formal and as weak as others under the tender care of her well-meaning nurses,—under the rival claims of Congregationalism and Episcopacy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIBLE AND THE MINISTRY.

Two questions, neither of which have at present received the attention they deserve, have now to be examined. The one is, *the relation of the Bible to an ungodly world*; the other, *the true idea of the Christian ministry*.

On the first of these subjects I am inclined to think much popular misapprehension prevails. It seems to be taken for granted that the Bible is as much God's gift to the *world* as it is to the Church; that it was intended to be a means of *conversion* quite as much as of edification; that it is as adapted to *create* spiritual want as to supply that want where it exists.

But is this the fact? Granting, as beyond question among Protestants, that Holy Scripture should be *open* to all, and that facilities for its study should be afforded to every inquirer after truth, is it equally clear that it should be placed in the hands of all, whatever their state of mind and heart may happen to be? I think not.

Much that it contains is, without doubt, common property, and fitted alike for young and old, poor and rich, educated and uninstructed; for no other book contains so many facts with which it is important mankind should be acquainted, and, when devoutly read, no other book is so well adapted to purify the taste, to enlarge the mind, or to improve the heart.

But it is a two-edged sword. Its perusal may be as mischievous to some as it is advantageous to others, and in its distribution the exhortation of the Lord must be ever kept in mind, "Be ye wise as serpents, but harmless as doves."

The very structure of the book indicates this need. It consists of and embodies, first, the literature of a divinely chosen and miraculously governed nation; then, inspired records involving at every step supernatural interferences on behalf of given men and given teaching; finally letters which from their very nature must sometimes be as incomprehensible to the irreligious as the mystic prophecy with which the whole concludes. What can it have to say to a man who disbelieves in the supernatural altogether, and who criticizes chapter by chapter, just as he would any other ancient document?

He may admit much that it contains. He may regard it as largely historical. He may be charmed by its poetry, or fascinated by its simplicity. He may, both intellectually and morally, be the better for such of its teachings as seem to him useful and instructive. Beyond this it can have no value, or rather, only be of value to the extent that the man is morally and spiritually prepared for its examination; yet we regard the sacred volume as intended to be the chief means of the world's conversion, and we scatter it broadcast *with that view*. That experience has to some extent corrected this error may be allowed, for both at home and abroad every effort is now made *to sell* the sacred volume as preferable to gratuitous distribution. But this does not altogether meet the evil; for it is anything but wholesome that the poor should be coaxed into the purchase of a Bible, or be led to believe that the mere possession of the book is a religious privilege,

its purchase an act of piety. The present utter alienation of the artisan class from everything that is Christian is evidence enough how little they have benefited by the book thus pressed upon them. Might it not diminish our complacency in the fact that we have now circulated, through the various Bible societies of Europe and America, eighty-five millions of copies of the Scriptures in whole or in part, were it possible for us to ascertain how many of these have been distributed in utter neglect of the direction of the Lord, "Cast not your pearls before swine"?

I am quite aware that the ground I am now treading is peculiarly delicate; that almost every word I write is liable to misconstruction; that many will hasten to infer that on this point I either sympathize with Romanists, or that from some cause or other I am opposed to the Bible Society, and have become desirous of discouraging the circulation of the Scriptures.

As I should be very sorry to convey to any mind so erroneous an impression, I think it better to say at once that I have no such tendencies; that what I wish to convey is, *not* that any man, however wicked, should be *shut out* from the reading of the Divine record, but that the sacred volume ought not to be placed in the hands of persons who are not more or less *desirous* of knowing what God has revealed, and who are not, in some degree at least, prepared to receive the Word in its true character, to read it reverently, and to respect its contents. The parable of the sower, so often brought forward to show that the Bible should be broadcast over the world, really teaches a different lesson. The wise sower does not cast his seed anywhere, or fling it from him at random, he sows only on *previously prepared* ground. True, in so doing, some seeds may fall by the wayside, some among

thorns, and some on rock but superficially covered with soil. Yet this is not his intent ; it is an accidental circumstance, over which he has no control. That which falls on the *ploughed* ground can alone be expected to take root and bring forth fruit.

The Christian may have much *to say* to persons who are by no means in a prepared state of mind. He may have much *to do*, both for the hater of truth and for the scoffer at it, in the way of benevolent help,—in imparting which he is, of course, bound to direct attention to the Divine giver of all good, and to do what he can to excite a desire for the knowledge of His will ; but until that desire is excited he is not justified in exposing to scorn a book which, *misused*, can do its possessor no good, but may do him, in many ways, great harm.

I fear that in our desire for extension, in our admiration of magnificent plans and gigantic combinations, we have in this matter sadly neglected the Saviour's wise teaching ; that we have been far too mechanical and indiscriminate in our circulation of the Scriptures ; far too ready to imagine that the mere multiplication of copies by the printing press must of necessity advance the Redeemer's kingdom ; that the most thoughtless or unwilling perusal of a Bible is likely to be accompanied by a Divine blessing ; perhaps more than half disposed to believe that because the word of God is to the Christian the sword of the Spirit, searching the very thoughts and intents of the heart, therefore it is likely to be to every man " the candle of the Lord."

But is it so ? Have we not evidence to the contrary ? Have we not but too much reason to believe that casting, as we have so largely done, this pearl of great price before men quite unprepared to estimate its value, the result has

been precisely what the Lord has led us to expect—the rising up of a school, numbering among its disciples not only the great majority of the active and cultivated intellects of the age, but nearly the whole body of skilled artisans,—*the masses of modern society*,—which only turns again and “rends us;” *rends us* by criticism, appropriate enough from the unbelieving standpoint of those who issue it, but only a thorn in the side of those who see by another light; *rends us* by contrasting our so-called Christian nations, and their conventional morality, with the Sermon on the Mount; *rends us* by insinuating doubts which, apart from supernatural influence, can never be dispelled; *rends us* by separating the morality of the Bible from its Divinity; *rends us* by lowering its entire tone and teaching to the standard of what is called practical life; *rends us* by making the revelation a thing of earth rather than of heaven,—a record which may be improved or expurgated, accepted or rejected in whole or in part, according as it may be found to agree with human intuitions, or accord with human aims and ends.

When shall we learn that it is one of God’s great laws that the seed and the soil must be adapted to each other? When shall we not only admit, but believe and act on the belief, that the Spirit must precede the Word, or the book, however ably translated, or however frequently read, will be, for all its highest purposes, as effectually sealed as if it were presented in an unknown tongue?

Yet are we not, from fear of consequences, to withhold it, *when sought*, from any; nor are we to delay opening it up by translation, as God may enable us, to every people under heaven, for we know not whom the Lord our God may call. All I say is, that *as a rule*, the “living epistle” and oral testimony should *precede* the written document. There

have been instances, I doubt not, in which the apparently accidental possession of a Bible has appeared, so far as man may judge, to have been the sole means of spiritual change ; but these cases are rare and exceptional. *Speaking generally, it is evidently God's design that men should be drawn to Him, not by books or tracts, however useful in their place, but by the human voice and by means of human affections.

The "message" of the Gospel, as embodied in its great facts and elementary principles, is indeed, whether delivered by the preacher, or gathered from Scripture, "worthy of all acceptation," albeit but few perceive that worthiness ; but the deeper things of God,—the hidden mysteries which are revealed in the Bible,—are not for all men. As in the days when Jesus was on earth, so now, and *for the same reasons*, hidden though they be in great measure from us, the Lord of light and love sees it best to say, regarding the many, "Unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive ; and hearing they may hear, and not understand." The word withheld, because it would be abused, is doubtless kept back in love ; and the mere fact that Divine Truth *always has been*,—in every age as now,—placed absolutely beyond the reach of the far greater part of the inhabitants of the earth, might alone help us to understand the many intimations of Scripture which point to a great future restoration, and encourage us to hope that in other worlds, and under happier auspices, apparently lost myriads will eventually be brought home on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. At present the law is, "To him that hath shall be given ; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath."

Need I say that what is true of the Bible is still more so

of the religious tract? Anything less suited to indiscriminate circulation than ordinary religious tracts it would be impossible to conceive of. Embodiments as they are for the most part of Puritan theology, dealing largely with the deep things of God, full of texts torn from their connection and applied, or rather accommodated, at the pleasure of the writer, nothing can be more mischievous than to scatter them, as is so often done, by the wayside, or to give them, at random, to every passing stranger. As well might a physician, under false notions of benevolence, fling his prescriptions before all the sick people he met, without the slightest regard to their varying conditions, or indeed taking the least trouble to ascertain their true state. Now and then he would find they did good, and even saved life. To how many they might do harm he would not of course care to know.

And here I cannot but refer to an address just delivered by the Chairman of the Congregational Union to the representatives of that body in session assembled. I do so, not merely because it was a discourse of unusual excellence, but chiefly because the sentiments expressed were eagerly indorsed by the assembly and ordered for publication. I do not of course pretend that the opinions in question are identical with my own, but I do say that *principles* were involved which, whether perceived by the hearers or not, go far to condemn very much of what is the pride and boast of the religious world.

The topic of discourse was "the relation of the ministry in its public exercises to the standard of the Christian life commonly attained" by those who listen to it. The speaker, while deeply in earnest, was calm and dispassionate, and his address, as reported, is free from all one-sided and exaggerated statement.

The judgment he formed of *things as they are* seems to be this,—that while much good is doing, it is characteristic of our day that Christians generally are found in a low spiritual condition; that they have little thought or expectation of rising, *while in this world*, into a much higher state; that they do not think such advancement *imperatively necessary*, or even practicable; that they deliberately abandon any *signal improvement* of their nature to the day when they shall open their eyes on the world of spirits; in short, that they are, for the most part, “*resigned* to the evil which they cannot hope in this imperfect state to escape.”

Thus judging, he naturally inquires, what relation the public service of the ministry bears to this state of things?

He holds—and in so doing he asserts a truth little recognized amongst us—that the ministry is instituted rather for “the perfecting of the saints” than for the conversion of the world; and if *that chief end* is not generally attained, he thinks it fitting to ask *why* it is not.

On two things he lays stress. One is, that while in the public ministrations of the Church he thinks there is little or no unfaithfulness in the exhibition of cardinal truths, and while *valuable impressions* are, from to time, made upon hearers, the awakened conscience is not sufficiently disciplined or guided, nor the detail of Christian duty sufficiently entered into. The other is, that enough is not done in public to elucidate the meaning of Scripture *in a way likely to direct and guide subsequent study*.

WORK, he says—and how truly!—is now commonly prescribed as “one of the most effectual means of personal improvement,” and sometimes in a way that would imply that if abundant work is committed to the Christian convert’s hands, his spiritual safety and progress are all but

insured. But he adds, Christian activity and labour will not suffice for this, for the most active and laborious Christians are "sometimes seen to *decline* in the power and life of the Spirit."

He sees, among other hindrances to what is good, the demand for "strong emotional excitement;" and he thinks it "*an evil sign* when a congregation disperses with satisfaction on every face, and praise on every tongue;" for, he goes on to say, it is the preacher's duty to preach sermons which his hearers "often ought not to be able to enjoy, since he is sent not to please, but to instruct."

He does not see, or seeing, ignores the fact, that the minister who did this would very soon be reminded by his deacons that he was injuring "the cause," emptying the pews, and sowing the seeds of trouble in the Church, for his people hear him only because they like him as a preacher,—only because he *reflects* what they regard to be the truth,—only because they are comfortable under his teaching.

He sees, further, that men now-a-days make as much haste to be rich spiritually as they do materially; that they practically say they must become wise *swiftly*, or not at all; that religion, like business, must yield quick returns: and he well observes, this impatience ought not to be regarded, "for the true artist is not moved in the execution of his work by the haste and rush of the world around him."

He forgets, or fails to perceive, that a modern minister has no power to resist the current feeling of the day, unless he is willing to become a martyr. His very position, whether in or out of the Established Church, forbids that he should set himself against any phase of public opinion that is fixed and decided. He is no artist, pausing when

he thinks it needful to do so. He is working for his bread, and, whether it be a wholesome proceeding or not, *he must go on*. And not for bread only, but for position, for influence, for all that he has been taught to regard as usefulness.

The speaker sees plainly enough that the judgment which now subordinates all other purposes of the ministry to the conversion of the ungodly is a false one; he regrets that a writer of considerable influence in the Nonconformist churches should have said that "the saving of souls is of far more importance than the care of converts;" he complains of the perpetual cry that "the end of the ministry is to convert men—to win souls for Christ,"—rather than for the presenting of every man perfect in Christ Jesus; that it is indeed commonly supposed to exist *chiefly* for purposes other than those which the Master and His apostles emphatically declared it was instituted for.

All this he sees, but he does not see that *if souls are perishing* because the Gospel is not more frequently or more impressively presented to them, no other conclusion is possible to a *humane* man than the one he laments,—viz., that everything else must be laid aside to carry on the work of saving them; that if Christ has really made the conversion of the world to depend on the exertions of the Church, Christians may very excusably avoid much devotion of time to their own growth in grace, if thereby they can do more to promote the eternal welfare of others.

Above all, he seems to forget that pulpit discourses, when addressed, as they always must be, to mixed audiences, are altogether unadapted to promote the perfecting of character; that such discourses can, in the very nature of things, never have more than a *general* relation to the circumstances and character of those to whom they are

addressed ; that the *guidance* which he thinks necessary to the formation and growth of Christian excellence can never be imparted in any discriminating way to a mingled crowd of young and old, men and women, righteous and unrighteous, thoughtful and careless persons,—to such as, in fact, ordinarily constitute the audience of a preacher ; that to enter into the *details* of Christian duty in a public place of worship would neither be practicable nor profitable ; that such a mode of instruction cannot make provision for it ; and that, even if it did, it would commonly happen that the man who was well qualified to arouse or to impress would be quite unable to build up an experienced believer ; that he would of necessity be oftentimes too young,—have too little knowledge of the world,—be, in all respects, too inexperienced for such a task ; that to attempt it would only be to fail, by demonstrating his own utter incapacity to perform a work which requires qualities the very opposite of those which are demanded of the popular preacher. The truth is, *character* never was, nor ever can be, formed or developed by public address. Only by private instruction, by confidential intercourse, by a close, personal application of Scripture to known wants and circumstances, can any man be permanently influenced. Public speech can rarely do more than call attention to deficiencies, and excite a desire or determination to remedy them by watchfulness, by secret discipline, and by a close personal contact with the word and the Spirit of God.

And here a very serious question arises, which it is by no means easy to answer. It is this,—Is it true, as is sometimes affirmed, that popular evangelical religion, as ordinarily presented, has, in some directions, a *deteriorating* effect on those who come under its influence, so that

certain classes of character become *worse* instead of better in consequence of the religious views they adopt?

I fear there is more truth in this affirmation than we are generally willing to admit. I believe that instances not a few can be found, in which men, after falling under the influence of evangelical religion in some of its more popular forms, have become less conscientious in relation to the fulfilment of certain duties, less candid in their judgments, less unselfish in their creed, less disinterested in the pursuit after truth, than they were before what has been termed their conversion.

Nor is it so very difficult to see a reason for this. Virtue has much more to do with a healthy, calm, and well-balanced mind than has been generally supposed. If a man—which is by no means an uncommon case—receives the Gospel in a one-sided form; if he gets excited about it; if he is led to dwell overmuch on his own personal safety; if he comes to imagine himself a sort of favourite of God; if in exalting justification by faith alone he is led to undervalue moral worth; if his mind is diverted from endeavours after personal improvement, even though it be by dwelling on his privileges as a Christian; if he begins to associate the Divine favour with the particular class of views he holds as all-important; if he accustoms himself to wink at corruptions in the Church; if he hardens into a religious partisan; if he once gets the notion into his head that he is in Goshen, and the rest of mankind in Egyptian darkness; if he exalts doctrine over life, zeal and activity over passive graces—anything, in short, over moral likeness to Christ, *he is sure to deteriorate*. And that so many do, if not go back, at least fail to advance in nobility of character, need excite no surprise when it is recollected how little is done for the education and training of the

believer,—how common is the delusion that if men once repent and believe, growth in grace will follow as a matter of course!

The question of questions for all of us is,—What is the remedy, and where is it to be found?

I am no believer in panaceas of any kind; still less do I imagine that I am in possession of any sovereign remedy for ills so deeply seated as are those of the Church in the present day. But I do not think I can be far wrong in suggesting that, if the weakness of which we now hear so much be real, it *must* be occasioned by our neglect of some one or other of the means God has provided for the education and training of His people.

Two things, I suppose, will be admitted:—first, that the Lord and His apostles always teach that the Christian life, like everything else that is to be exhibited in humanity, requires long and careful culture ere it can reach even a relative perfection; and secondly, that among ourselves the only recognized agency for promoting growth in knowledge, in faith, or in love, is “the ministry of the Gospel,” including under that term discourses from the pulpit, and the instruction imparted in what are usually termed Bible classes. Religious books can scarcely be reckoned as more than incidental aids, and religious service, whether in the Sunday school or in the visitation of the poor, however valuable, must in like manner be regarded as a result of piety rather than as a means of spiritual improvement. Work of this kind *may* be, and no doubt frequently is, greatly favourable to the health and growth of the soul; but inasmuch as it is very easy to do religious work in an irreligious spirit, it by no means follows that employment of this character has any necessary connection with advancement in the life and power of the Spirit.

MINISTRY, using that word in its scriptural sense, is undoubtedly *the* great agency for the moral and spiritual growth of the body of Christ, and one in the absence of which all other agencies are comparatively of little worth. But ministry is of two kinds; it is *to* the world and *for* the Church. It is the heralding of the glad tidings of redemption through Christ to all who will listen, and it is the edifying of those who believe, by exposition of Scripture, and by the cultivation of all the graces therein commended and enforced.

The question is, Can these two ends be accomplished at one and the same time? Do the obligations they involve properly fall upon one and the same person? On the answer given to this all-important inquiry almost everything turns.

The experiences of 1,800 years, whatever they may be worth, are certainly on the affirmative side, for everywhere, and in all ages, the worship and teaching of the Church have been public property. The congregation, the parish, the nation, have all in turn been invited and commanded to unite in common prayer, and to listen to a discourse intended for them all. At the Lord's Supper alone have Protestants ever sought to separate classes, granting to some participation in an ordinance which has been withheld from others. Our churches and chapels are all conducted on the assumption that the same worship and the same lesson are adapted to all, since it is in the power of the preacher to discriminate in his address, alternating his exhortations and appeals to the righteous and the wicked. The religious world of our day—using that term in its widest sense, as including all who profess and call themselves Christians—is *the result* of the system.

That this mixed body has its bright as well as its dark side cannot be disputed truth can never be reached by

ignoring either the one side or the other. Let us then admit, for we honestly may, that, bad as the world is, it probably never was better than at the present moment. It is certain there never was so much *religiousness* in England as there is now. There are, indeed, black spots upon us, of which we have great need to be ashamed; but truth seems to demand the admission that men in general were never wiser, gentler, or more considerate in their relations to one another than they are now; that laws never were so just, manners so humane, or religious knowledge so widely extended; while it is indubitably certain that an amount of active benevolence is now called forth of which other ages knew nothing.

True, indeed, it is, that ours is an age of *low ideals*, and of *feeble convictions*, of much insincerity and of wide-spread scepticism. True, also, it may be, that our religion has now become a *respectable* rather than a self-denying thing; that, as it has been cleverly said, "it generally divides its affections with the utmost impartiality between this world and that which is to come;" that what once meant "the embodiment of all truth and holiness in the midst of a world lying in wickedness, now often means philanthropic societies."

All this may be admitted, and much more too, without shaking the fact that nevertheless men *are* wiser than they once were; that, as the result of a wider sense of brotherhood, commerce is uniting nations too long severed by their mistakes; that liberty, the handmaid of intelligence, is ever marching onward; that physical science is extending its benefits on every side, imparting to multitudes that material comfort without which moral growth is hopeless; that the Bible is now distributed in all lands; and, amid whatever drawbacks, that the

knowledge of the Gospel, both at home and abroad, is steadily advancing.

To many persons this will seem enough, or if not enough, at least as much as ought reasonably to be expected. Instead of dissatisfaction, such will say, all around us calls for gratitude and gratulation.

Everything, as I have observed before, turns upon our *ideal* of Christianity,—upon what we believe Christ intended His Gospel to be and to do. If it came into the world, as so many seem to think, merely or chiefly to improve society, to adorn humanity as a whole, to make the earth a happier dwelling-place for the children of men than it otherwise would be, it is not unreasonable to say that if it has not yet done its work, it is at all events rapidly completing it. But if, on the other hand, we regard these ends as only secondary and incidental; if the *primary* object of the Saviour was the *immediate* perfecting—I had almost said deifying (2 Pet. i. 4)—of the few, with a view to the ultimate benefit of the many; if Scripture means what it says when it affirms that the disciples of the Redeemer are to be a peculiar people, dead to the world, alive unto Christ—men having both obligations and privileges distinct from others, everywhere called upon to keep themselves somewhat apart, and bidden always to live in the expectation of the return of their Lord,—*then* the whole case changes, a different standard is applied, and a different judgment is the result.

Of course it will be understood that I regard the latter and higher view as alone tenable from Scripture; and I can scarcely be mistaken in supposing that such is the conviction of the author of the “Address” from which I have quoted.

Accepting, then, the opinions there stated as furnishing

the most recent, the most unobjectionable, and the most authoritative utterance on our actually existing religious condition,—since it comes before us with the endorsement of a numerous and influential ecclesiastical body, of all others least disposed to take dark views, and more than most delighting to be identified with modern progress,—I trust I shall not be charged with cynicism if in their words I repeat, that while individual examples of great moral and spiritual excellence abound, “*the proportion is very large* (among real Christians) of persons who exhibit but feebly and indecisively the Christian spirit and life;” that “low attainment expresses the prevailing character of the religious life of the day;” that “observation will bear further witness to the very frequent absence of all earnest desire and endeavour after a truer and nobler life;” that “there is often no conviction of any urgent necessity for it;” and that, “however desirable this higher life may seem to be, it is the reward of a labour which it is not possible to expend in the acquisition of it.”

Now on these statements, in the fidelity and accuracy of which I firmly believe, I am simply desirous of remarking that *it is impossible that things should be otherwise so long as the preaching of the Gospel to the world is conducted as it is, and while the Ministry of the Church is altogether in abeyance.*

In relation to the first of these subjects—the general preaching of the Gospel—I most heartily echo the statement that neither Clergymen nor Dissenting ministers are, as a body, by any means chargeable with unfaithfulness. I believe that there never was a time when preachers were, as a rule, more earnest, more devoted, or better qualified for their work than they are now.

It may be, as has been suggested, that the minister often

“wants faith” in the possibility of elevating the character of his people. It may be that, “when face to face with hundreds of souls whose failures and weaknesses and dangers appeal to him for help,” he sometimes fails, in the brief period that is allotted to him, “to bring out the meaning of the Divine word ;” to “carry it home as spirit and life” to the consciences of his hearers ; to “show a due regard to the range and comparative worth of motives ;” to “guide the formation and growth of Christian character ;” to “treat with sufficient frequency and fullness and explicitness of the moral dispositions and habits,” or to give adequate directions for the use of recognized means of spiritual “improvement.” But all this is merely to say that he cannot perform impossibilities,—that it is folly to ask for services which no human being, under the circumstances, can render.

What, then, is to be done ? I reply, first of all, separate the preaching of the Gospel to the ignorant and unconverted from the Ministry of the Church, for *until this is done, it is absolutely impossible to take a single step in advance.* How much a change of this kind involves we shall perceive as we proceed in the further investigation of our subject.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL.

By the Preacher of the Gospel I here mean the herald of good news—the publisher of the glad tidings of redemption—the evangelist as distinguished from the pastor.

I say emphatically the herald of “*glad tidings*,”—of “*good news*,” and not of wrath or of condemnation, because I believe the special and peculiar work of the preacher to be the announcement of a *great salvation*. He is the messenger of One who came “not to condemn the world, but to save it.”

“Wrath,” says the apostle Paul to the Romans—“the wrath of God” against evil—is *already revealed*, is continually *being revealed*, “not in the Gospel, but in a universally to be seen revelation” (Alford); it is a wrath revealed every day, both in the operations of physical law, and in the visibly disastrous moral consequences which sin always entails upon those who indulge in it. No special revelation is needed to teach man that God hates all wrongdoing. The Gospel does not come to tell us of a wrath that nature and conscience have always proclaimed. It is tidings of *deliverance* from the wrath. It is the revelation of a Redeemer, of One “mighty to save.”

But though the Gospel does not come to reveal wrath, it does most clearly justify the righteousness of God *in being*

wroth with sinners, since they are evil-doers, not by necessity, but of choice. The wrath, be it observed, is against men who, in consequence of their ungodliness, *hold down* and suppress such truth as they have received, and in so doing *sin against light*.

Further, the salvation to be announced, although involving, as a consequence, deliverance from the just indignation of a righteous God, and hence from the misery necessarily flowing therefrom, is stated to be primarily and essentially *from sin*,—from the *evil self*. It is deliverance from the dominant power of “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

It is not presented to us as a salvation from hell, carrying with it a present joyful deliverance from the fear of unutterable pain; it is salvation from a disobedient will, carrying with it an immediate and conscious reconciliation to God.

Need it be said that we have no right whatever, on the plea of hoping to do more good, to *change* this order of things, or to present the Gospel to the rebellious in any other form than that in which it is revealed?

We have no commission to teach, and we can find no justification in teaching any man, that God demands *his love*, on pain of eternal torment; or that it is because we know the terrors of the Lord, the fearfulness of the punishment He inflicts, that we seek to drive sinners to Christ. *Such is not the character of the message the Lord has bidden us to deliver*. Paul indeed says, “Knowing the terror (or, as it should rather read, the fear) of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. v. 11); but the terror or fear—take the word as we may—refers to himself, not to those whom he addresses. The sentiment of the text is, “Being a genuine fearer of God, I endeavour to make my plain dealing evident to men, as it is evident to God” (Alford).

Yet how differently we act ! I have at this moment, and *quite by accident*, lying before me two very recent numbers of a small religious periodical, edited by an excellent minister in Scotland, and having *a very large sale* on both sides of the Tweed, in which I find, either in extracts from sermons or in editorial remarks, the following statements,—all, be it observed, within the compass of sixteen pages. I take them just as they stand :—

“Sinner, supposing you were never to commit another sin, you are as sure of being in hell and suffering there as that you are now alive. Stop, then, working, eating, sleeping, until you get your soul saved. Now is the moment for it ; and if you take God’s way it will not require longer than one tick of your watch to believe in Christ, and so to get rid of the fearful wages of sin. His (the Lord’s) receiving those wages of sin is the same as if you had personally received them.”

Again,—

“If the death of Jesus does not attract you, may the thought of hell *scare* you—may the eternity of torment *terrify* you. Many of you are going to be damned. How shall ye escape the damnation of hell, asks Jesus, if ye continue to neglect so great salvation as that which is preached unto *you* from week to week ?”

Surely it is not justifiable to take the words of the Lord to the “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” and to affirm, in effect, that *He* connects them with a portion of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and sanctions the statement that they who neglect sermons are by Him doomed to everlasting misery. A religion of this sort is, like Romanism, a religion of *terror*, and too often of mere selfishness.

But what shall we say to *habitual untruthfulness* in the use of Scripture when sinners are addressed ? Yet here it is, *full blown*.

The preacher is seeking to convince his hearers that their natures are utterly depraved ; and thus he proves his point :—

“Isaiah,” he says, “tells us what we are. ‘From the sole of the foot even unto the crown of the head there is no soundness in us, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.’ And God does not compromise the matter, but adds, ‘The *whole* head is sick, and the *whole* heart faint.’ ”

A glance at the first chapter of Isaiah will suffice to show that all this is, *so far as the passage quoted is concerned*, false teaching, since the prophet is speaking, *not* of the depraved nature of the Israelites, but of the severity of the punishment God had recently inflicted on them by the hand of the heathen.

But the speaker proceeds,—

“Every sinner is a condemned man; for it is written, ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die’ (Ezek. xviii. 20).”

Yet here, too, *so far as the text is concerned*, the teaching is false, since Ezekiel goes on to say that he who will “do that which is lawful and right shall surely live, he shall not die” (ver. 21). That many of the offences spoken of are only against the ceremonial law, and that the death threatened is temporal death for disobedience, will be plain enough to any one who will take the trouble to read from the sixth to the sixteenth verse of the chapter.

But again,—“‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock,’ says Christ; and if I knock at your door, it is to tell you salvation is a completed work.” Such is the view of the preacher; but a glance at the text (Rev. iii. 20) will show that the Lord is addressing a lukewarm church; that He is referring to the immediateness of His second advent; that He is *not* speaking to the sinner, and telling him that salvation is a completed work.

Again, the sinner is told, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the people that *forget* God” (Psa. ix. 17), the object being to show that forgetfulness and inattention to the Gospel involve the same doom as its absolute rejection. But the fact is, the word translated “hell” is the

same word (*sheol*) that is used by Jacob when he exclaims, "I shall go down to *the grave* mourning," and that the punishments of the world to come are not referred to at all. *So far, then, as the text in question is concerned*, in all respects the teaching is again false.

Will it be said that, in cases of this kind, "the end sanctifies the means"? Surely not by any man who believes that, above all things, God honours truth.

Of other assertions, as dogmatically insisted upon as if they were clearly revealed facts—such as that "before a man can obtain peace, he must know *the grounds* on which God has made a settlement of his sin; or that, having believed, he is to consider himself at once equal to the highest saint; that he is not to talk about 'getting behind the door in heaven,' but to say, 'My ticket is a ticket for the throne-seat. I will pass through all the angel ranks till I be seated with Jesus on the throne'"—I will here say nothing; but when I am perpetually told that, in complaining of perverted Scripture, I am contending with an imaginary evil, it is needful to justify one's course.

What I maintain is, that these excited utterances, whether from the pulpit or the press, are not the Gospel. *Not* in this way did either Christ or His apostles preach. Not by such means did they commend the truth to every man's conscience as in the sight of God.

Further, I greatly doubt whether we are justified in making the use we do of hymns and prayers *as means of conversion*. I say nothing here about *the kind* of hymns that are now used in revivals, or *the kind* of prayers that

* This last quotation is from a sermon by an *uneducated* revival preacher, who addresses multitudes with great power; but it is inserted by the editor not only without a note of warning, but accompanied by the expression of a belief that the preacher must have been "*helped of the Lord.*"

are frequently offered. I speak of the use, *in any form*, of prayer and praise,—the chief privileges of the Christian,—*as weapons of assault* upon the unbeliever. I do not believe that the apostles or the first Christians *would* have so used them. I see no evidence whatever that they would have invited any one to join them in these sacred services, with whom they would not have been prepared to break bread in memory of the Lord.

Again, I find nothing in the Acts of the Apostles, or in any other part of Scripture, which would lead us to suppose that, in the Christian assemblies, appeals or addresses were ever delivered which took for granted that a large portion of the congregation consisted of persons who were present only as attendants on a means of grace, and who came simply *to be acted upon*; or that the first teachers of Christianity ever encouraged the notion that such attendance was, if not in itself religion, at least the nearest approach to it that an unconverted man could make.

The proclamation of the Gospel to the world at large was then evidently regarded as something quite distinct from the assembly of the saints; and it was, I believe, never accompanied by services of worship which properly belong only to the Christian. The deluding absurdity of first inviting a congregation to unite as Christians in exercises of prayer and praise, and then addressing them as little better than heathen, was certainly avoided.

Let me not, however, here be misconceived. I do not say that we are never to pray with the irreligious. On the contrary, when such persons *wish* that supplications should ascend; when we have any reason to believe that *a want* is felt which it is desired we should express; when, in fact, we are really but interpreters of the felt need of others, nothing can be more appropriate. But this is a very dif-

ferent thing from giving, as is often done, either to prayer or praise, the character of a sermon, and offering either with the intent that it should act chiefly, if not entirely, on the feelings of the hearer.

And what reason is there to suppose that preaching, if separated from these adjuncts, would be at all less effective than it now is? The phenomenon of sudden conversion, indicated by deep grief, ecstatic warmth of feeling, and overflowing joy, so far as it is genuine, does not depend on these stimulants, and would still *occasionally* be observed; for these forms of excitement, although often delusive, and always to be dealt with prudently, are sometimes, without doubt, the result of true convictions. "Those who deride these things know little of the secret powers, the reserved forces of the human spirit, and are unaware that in the depths of ignorant and hardened, and weary and distracted souls, there is still a strength, blind and fettered like that of Samson, needing a shock to set it free." But such effects would then be legitimately produced, as they were under Peter's sermon at Pentecost, rather by a plain and pointed statement of facts, than by any appeal to the fears or passions of the hearer.

Again, evil, and not good, I think, arises when, Sunday after Sunday, as our custom is, the most thoughtless are *led to believe*, however frequently they may be *told* the contrary, that prayer and praise offered in the congregation is, in a certain sense, *their own act*, and that it partakes more or less of the nature of religion; that God is pleased with it; that what is called "attendance upon the appointed means of grace"—a phrase apparently intended to imply that the Lord has somewhere commanded ungodly men thus to assemble, *in order that they may receive from Him, while in this path of duty*, some promised blessing—is

obligatory on all. By what scriptures applicable under the New Testament economy such a view can be sustained I am at a loss to conceive.

At the same time I am far from supposing that those who ordinarily attend Divine worship, whether in or out of the Established Church, yet do not communicate at the table of the Lord—a class forming the great bulk of most congregations,—ought either to be considered as unbelievers, or to be dealt with as such. Such persons do not, as a rule, properly rank in that category. They are for the most part individuals in whom the Christian life is but partially or very feebly developed. What *they* need is not the constant reiteration of truths with which they are already well acquainted, but *spiritual education and training*—to be gained only in the communion of the Church, by intercourse with persons who *live* the Gospel, and by assistance and encouragement in the study of the Scriptures.

The class which I think is injured rather than benefited by outward admixture with true Christians, because always in danger of resting in mere formalism, or subsiding into unconscious hypocrisy, is that which includes in it the immoral, the profane, the utterly careless, the grossly ignorant, or the absolutely irreligious. Such should never be led to suppose, as there is too much reason to fear they often are, that their prayers—utterly insincere—can ever be other than an abomination to the Lord; that their affected songs of praise and thanksgiving can be anything but hateful to their Maker; that their attendance on public worship can be looked upon by Him in any other light than as a delusion or a pretext.

These ungodly ones, wherever they can be met with, whether in public or in private, should be solemnly warned

and earnestly invited ; but beyond this little can be done for them. To attempt more can, humanly speaking, do little good, and may do much harm.

There is a power in *silence* which is sometimes denied to speech. There is a force in pity, in sorrow, in affection, and, above all, in a consistent character, which is not found in reproach or in rebuke, in exhortation or in appeal. Who can tell that a witness of this kind, were it but common, might not be more effective than anything else ?

It would at least not injure those who are now too often *hardened* by the perpetual but profitless excitement of their feelings ; or *made formalists* by being ranked as worshippers ; or *deceived* by the supposition that taking a pew, and sitting regularly there, and paying subscriptions to religious objects, is religion ; or *led into fatalism* by their misapprehension of teachings regarding the Divine sovereignty which they have no faculty to understand ; or *seduced into hypocrisy* by a demand for professions in which the tongue outruns the heart ; or *become superstitious* by the abuse of sacraments ; or are filled with false ideas of God by the many perverted forms in which Divine truth is, for the sake of effect and immediate impression, presented day by day.

Yes ! granting, as we ought thankfully to do, that *much good* is done by preaching as it is now carried on, it is still anything but wise to forget or to refuse to see that *much harm* is also done by the same process, and that many are made worse by what is intended to amend them.

The apostle Paul seems to say that this was the case with his own ministry, even to the Church, when he tells the Corinthians that while it was unto one "a savour of life unto life," it was to another "a savour of death unto death" (2 Cor. ii. 16). He does not mean, as we com-

monly understand him, that his words carried with them either eternal life or eternal ruin to the hearer, but that the characteristic of his teaching was that it either elevated or deteriorated those who listened to it. It was so sincere and heartfelt (ver. 17); that instead of being a sort of neutral thing, neither doing good nor harm, as is the case with so much of human speech, it either quickened and strengthened the Divine life in a man, or deepened the darkness of his already dead soul.

May it not be, as a friend has suggested to me, "that because truth, misconceived or rejected, becomes mischievous to men, that the Lord so often spoke to the multitudes only in parables? He certainly *acted* on the supposition that few people are fit to *know much*; that few are fit to be *near Him*, or to have His mind opened to them; that to *have* the truth without loving it is perhaps the surest way of becoming devilish."

But you forget—many will here be ready to exclaim—that in spite of extravagances, of perversions of Scripture, and of supposed delusions, the word of the preacher very frequently comes home to the hearer *with a spiritual power* which man cannot impart, and that in this fact alone we have evidence of the general accordance of our proceedings with the Divine will.

No, I neither forget nor deny; but I discriminate. Power gained over others by excited address is commonly *mixed*. All spiritual forces are not Divine. There are "principalities and powers in heavenly places," against which we are to fight; and surely nothing is more certain than that a great deal of spiritual—in the sense of *superhuman*—impression is not of the Holy Ghost at all.

The Church of Christ sadly needs insight into some of

these things; for while many cannot distinguish that which is merely physical and material from that which is spiritual, many more fail, in obedience to apostolic precept, to "try" that which is confessedly superhuman, so as to distinguish the work of the Spirit of God from the work of Satan disguised as an angel of light. More still probably fail to separate impressions that are Divine from impressions which have been produced either by their own imaginations or by men of more or less spiritual power who have gained influence over them.

But it will be said, Is this discriminating course compatible with the fulfilment of the responsibility that God has laid upon us in relation to the unconverted? I think it is; because I believe the responsibility to be *a limited one*, to overpass which is to err.

My own deep and settled conviction is, that *the root* of nearly all the extravagance and fanaticism which has at various times disgraced Christianity, and which still—in forms modified by the civilization and public opinion of the society within which it appears—is periodically seen to spring up afresh, will be found in the erroneous, because unscriptural notion that God has made the eternal salvation of every sinner to depend on his knowledge or ignorance, his attention or inattention, *while in this world*, to the claims of truth; that consequently every human being, if unconverted, is in the condition of a man drowning at sea, or surrounded by flames in a burning house; that as in the supposed cases the primary duty of humanity would be, at all hazards, and, if needful, to the neglect of everything else, to throw the rope or rear the ladder, in default or in neglect of which the wretch must inevitably perish; so, in relation to eternity, the happiness or misery of every man hangs on the zeal and earnestness with which the

Church presents, and on the readiness or otherwise with which the sinner seizes, the hand stretched out for his deliverance.

I have already noticed how soon this mischievous supposition, applied to what was supposed to be a legitimate and merciful exercise of power, led to persecution. Charles James Fox is reported to have said that "the only foundation for toleration is a degree of scepticism, and without it there can be none. For if a man believes in the saving of souls, he must soon think about the means; and if by cutting off one generation he can save many future ones from hell-fire, it is his duty to do it." Happily, however, such scepticism need not extend beyond the rejection of certain human deductions which have no real alliance with living Christianity, and which were altogether unknown in the apostolic age.

John Foster but expresses the most reasonable of judgments when he says that "the ordinary orthodox view represents God as acting in a secondary or subordinate capacity to the human instruments He employs; since it supposes Him practically to say to His Church, 'If you zealously labour for men's salvation, I will save them; otherwise not.' According to this, the final state of a large portion of the human race is placed at the disposal of a certain order of human beings, who might have effected their salvation if they would,—a conclusion which," he adds, "I think borders on impiety."

Well may he ask, "*If it be so*,—if Christians really believe that the immense majority of mankind are doomed to suffer, by penal infliction, any form of eternal torture, and this mainly through their neglect or indolence,—how *can* they have any calm enjoyment of life? how *can* they ever be cordially cheerful? If the tremendous doctrine be

true, surely it ought to be continually proclaimed as with the blast of a trumpet, with ardent passion, in almost every form of terrible illustration.”*

Yet, strange as it must seem to some, no such “passion” breathes in the New Testament. *There* all is calm, hopeful, and trustful.

That the early believers had relatives and friends living unspiritual lives, alienated from, if not opposed to, the Gospel of Christ, is certain. Yet not a word can be found which would lead us to suppose that they thought their unconverted husbands or wives, parents or children, were living on the brink of a precipice, from which they might, at any moment, be plunged into eternal woe. St. Paul indeed, in a burst of patriotic feeling, goes so far as to say he could wish himself made an anathema for his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh, who were madly abandoning their privileges as God’s chosen people; but he expresses no such feeling in relation to the Gentiles, although he was their chosen apostle; while of the Jews he says, “All Israel shall be saved.”

Nor is it unworthy of notice, that the one and only thing referred to as a means of conversion in the case of unbelieving relatives is A CONSISTENT EXAMPLE,—a godly walk and conversation.

The *holy calm* of the New Testament, when treating on the destinies of men, is to me wonderful. There is no excitement in it,—no passion,—no scorching heat; all is genial, trustful, and loving. To apostolic men the world was doubtless, as it is to us, a great mystery, but it was not a *painful* mystery; it was to them glorious riches,—“the riches of God’s glory” (Ephes. iii. 9—19; Col. i. 27),—

* “Life and Correspondence of John Foster,” vol. ii., pp. 405—416.

one which, far from bringing over their souls the profound gloom that so often crushes us, as with a darkness that may be felt, was a perennial source of joy and strength.

Is it needful to say how favourable this state of mind must have been to the formation of a *heavenly character*, or how unfavourable to that blessed result is habitual mental excitement? Only when we are calm are we, properly speaking, trustful. Only as our souls *repose* on God shall we ever seek after and embrace truth *for its own sake*. Only as we are able to *rely* on eternal wisdom and goodness shall we ourselves be either wise or good. Only as we are *at peace* in relation to others as well as to ourselves, can we *afford*, like God himself, to wait for the final development of designs which involve a wisdom that is infinite, and a mercy that "endureth for ever."

Let us *rest*, then, in the conviction that God's love to sinners is not limited by time; that there is at least a possibility of forgiveness in other worlds than this; that the lost here are not necessarily all lost hereafter; that, consequently, the eternal happiness or misery of the human race hangs on something far better than the zeal or the devotion of weak and fallible mortals.

Doing so, we shall be neither less earnest, nor, I trust, less successful in our endeavours to extend the knowledge of Christ, whether at home or abroad. But we shall proceed on somewhat different principles from those which now largely animate us. We shall sow the good seed more zealously than ever, but we shall be less restless about results. We shall learn not only when to speak, but when to be silent; not only when to work, but when to refrain from working; when, in short, to retire, that God may more manifestly come upon the scene.

In foreign missions we have, in one instance, *under the compulsion of Providence*, and sorely against our own views and wishes, followed the right path, and an abundant blessing has followed. But we have not discerned the lesson. That instance is the mission to Madagascar. The lesson taught us is, that our duty and responsibility end when we have once succeeded in planting the good seed in any country ; that its further development must be left in His hands, who alone can adapt it to the peculiar condition and circumstances of the people among whom it has been cast.

Missions carried on upon this principle would require comparatively few men ; the money needed for their support would be obtained almost without solicitation, and certainly without attempting to cast such a duty upon children, or upon persons who have not first given themselves to God. The movements of such agents, no longer guided by committees in London, would be left to Providence as interpreted by the spiritual insight of the labourers themselves ; the work would, for each man, be a temporary one, and therefore be mostly undertaken by the unmarried ; while the Gospel itself, no longer regarded as a European thing, or identified with Western civilization, would cease to be judged either by our soldiers or sailors, our merchants or our planters, and God's hand, rather than man's, would be visible to all.

Preaching to the careless and ungodly in our own country, carried on by persons specially devoted to this duty and sustained by others in its performance, would involve the same principle as evangelization in foreign lands. It would be the work of men specially gifted of God for its performance ; it would relate mainly to the proclamation of the *great facts* of the Gospel ; it would

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have little to do with entreaties or appeals to mere feeling ; it would keep clear of all low motives—of all regard to selfish fears or equally selfish hopes ; it would sow the seed, and leave the result to God ; it would seek to further no interest beyond that of truth ; it would ask no money, seek no power, gather no influence, and desire no spiritual statistics. The duty of heralding the Gospel once performed, all else would be left to Divine providence, that so man might be seen and felt to be nothing, and God all in all.

Other modes of spreading truth among the ignorant besides preaching—of witnessing for Christ in Christ's own spirit, and after Christ's own model—would speedily develop themselves. I have my own thoughts as to the forms which these would not improbably take ; but it would be impossible to state them here. I hope, if God permit, one day to lay them before others under the title of UNAGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY in principle and practice. If they do no more than furnish material with which others, even at a distant day, may build, I shall be abundantly satisfied ; for God's ways are "not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts." With Him "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.

By the Church I *here* understand not the one catholic and apostolic Church, which consists of "that body of men in whom the Spirit of God dwells as the source of their excellence; and who exist on earth for the purpose of exhibiting the Divine life and the hidden order of humanity;" a body "which has an existence continuous through the ages, on the principle of spiritual similarity of character;" but that portion of any given congregation who—in whatever way—have been so far affected and enlightened by truth as to *desire* growth in goodness. I include under the term *all* who, notwithstanding many imperfections, either of knowledge or character, whether communicants or not at the Lord's table, whether "fathers," "young men," or mere "babes in Christ," are yet so far Christians that they regard the Lord Jesus as their Redeemer, trust in Him for salvation, and more or less wish, amid whatever darkness of mind or infirmity of purpose, to know and do His will.

Such persons, whatever may be their degree of Christian development, form, I suppose, the majority in modern congregations, and need, above all other things, Christian culture. They may, I think, fitly be spoken of as "the Church," in distinction from the hypocritical, the formalist, the profane, or the grossly ignorant.

By THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH I do not mean the exclusive ministry of a pastor, however devoted he may be to the body over which he presides, but the ministry of *the Church itself*, or rather of such of its members as may be judged by their brethren to be qualified to instruct others; a ministry *including* that of the pastor, but under circumstances and arrangements which place him rather in the back than the foreground.

And this not because he is supposed to be less qualified than others to give the precise kind of instruction needed, but because his office, his higher attainments, his habit of public speech, the respect in which he is held, the associations and the prejudices, the modesty and the indolence of the people, will all combine, if he is prominent, to silence others, and to check, if not absolutely to prevent, the development of spiritual gifts among them.

That such a ministry prevailed in the apostolic churches will scarcely be disputed. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews evidently refers to it when he bids those he addresses not to forsake the assembling themselves together, as the manner of some is, but to exhort *one another*, and the more as they see the day (of the Lord) approaching (Heb. x. 25).

The abuses that sprang up in the Corinthian church, and the warning of James,—“My brethren, be not many masters” (*lit.*, teachers), also indicate not only the existence of this mode of mutual instruction, but its official regulation by apostolic wisdom. To pretend that it was put down because of the irregularities to which, in one instance at least, it gave rise, would be about as wise as to conclude that, for similar reasons, the observance of the Lord’s Supper ceased and determined.

That elders were appointed in every city is equally clear

from the sacred record; that these men were *especially endowed* with peculiar insight into truth, fitting them to be representatives of the apostles, is at least probable, not only from the exhortations given to Timothy and Titus (2 Tim. i. 6; Titus ii. 15), but also from the fact that the brethren are commanded to be in a sort of subjection to them (Heb. xiii. 7, 17.)

Open ministry and a settled pastorate in those days evidently went on together, as, indeed, they had done under the Jewish dispensation, in the worship of the synagogue. But there is nothing whatever to indicate that these settled pastors spent their strength in preparing sermons for mixed congregations, or that they ever attempted to fulfil obligations so conflicting and so inconsistent with each other as are those which devolve upon the modern minister. It was enough for them to guide the flock wisely, to be examples of faith and purity, and to build up those committed to their care in the knowledge and love of the Redeemer.

I am quite aware that I shall here be met at the outset by the taunt that this demand for open ministry is by no means a new one; that it has again and again been tried and found wanting; that its fruits are to be seen in the narrowness and bitterness of a sect, distinguished from all others by its intolerance and spiritual pride.

Without giving any opinion as to the extent to which this accusation may fairly be sustained, I beg to remark in reply, that, *so far as I am aware*, the open ministry of which I speak has *never* been tried since the days of the apostles.

Men have, indeed, at various times, endeavoured to establish something which they have called an open ministry, but this "new wine" has always been put into

the "old bottles," and, as a natural consequence, has soon come to grief.

The open ministry, *which is apostolic in character*, can never be made to work in any fellowship which is not in other respects primitive and apostolic. But no church is so which bases itself on a systematic theology,—which brings its discipline to bear on errors in dogma, or which regards the Holy Spirit as given for the development of doctrine rather than for the ennobling of character. Such churches, however simple in their organization, or however reformed in other particulars, are essentially post-apostolic, if not mediæval.

On such fellowship it is impossible to graft successfully an open ministry worthy of the name; for free teaching and fettered thought are in all respects incongruous. Open speech and an open heart must go together.

Another error, equal in magnitude, and alone sufficient to account for failure in the attempts referred to, has been the depreciation and rejection, not only of any fixed educated ministry whatever, but the discouragement of all previous preparation by those who do speak, founded on the notion that such persons, if called to instruct at all, are directly moved and enabled to do so by the Holy Spirit. Tyranny or anarchy, in this case, sooner or later, inevitably follows. Admit the claim, and a submission quite as abject as that demanded by Rome is but a reasonable service. Deny it, and it becomes impossible to endure the folly which even the best of men sometimes fall into, if they imagine themselves to be teaching by the power of the Holy Ghost, when they are really speaking only out of the emptiness of their own minds.

But does it thence follow, if this dream of semi-inspiration be abandoned, and intelligent Christians are

encouraged by their brethren to speak out of the fulness of their hearts,—*immediately moved* only by the force of convictions which have been formed by long and patient study of Scripture, but *inwardly sustained* by that great Teacher who has given them strength and wisdom through the varied experiences of a life of humble piety,—that this, too, must be unprofitable? Far from it. Teaching of this kind, wherever it can be had, is of priceless value.

I am not, under the designation of open ministry, speaking of what is commonly called lay preaching. This is a work which very few private Christians are fitted to undertake, and which fewer still desire. As a rule, nothing can be less adapted to a delicate mind,—nothing more alien to the position or powers of a sensitive man,—nothing more offensive to his taste, than to be *borne with* by a mixed congregation as a sort of second-hand orator. This is not what we want, nor is this the contradiction to the flesh which Christ calls upon His children to endure.

Unhappily, what we *really* need is not wanted by the Church. The model layman of our own day is the man who, early in attendance, is regularly to be seen in his pew, attentive to strangers, interested in the prosperity of the church or chapel to which he belongs, hospitable to his minister, liberal in his charities, and of good repute in the world. As a natural consequence, such men abound. Beyond this we do not seem able to get. And why? Simply because we do not *desire* anything better.

In the meantime piety dwindles, truth stagnates, and stagnation breeds spiritual malaria, sometimes diffusing active and fatal poisons, more frequently lowering vitality without endangering life. Spiritual gifts either disappear or remain undeveloped. Disturbance of the accustomed course, however healthful, is the great object of dread.

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All alike fear innovation, and agree to offer passive if not active resistance to every form of thought, whether true or false, which seems likely to occasion trouble.

I repeat,—an open ministry, if it is to work at all, must be anti-dogmatic ; must keep within its own sphere ; must relate mainly, if not exclusively, to that which is moral and spiritual ; it must not interfere with the proper work either of the preacher of the Gospel or of the recognized pastor ; it must aim neither at the development of doctrine nor at the conversion of the world ; its one object and end must be the perfecting of the Church in knowledge and in love.

Only as it is of this character will it resemble the ministry of early communities, founded and guided by inspired apostles ; for in *these* we invariably find union depending, not on common beliefs, but on a common love to a person—the Lord Jesus Christ. This, says Dr. Chalmers, “appears historically to have been the original bond of the Christian Church. Whoever was willing to receive Christ as his master, to join His people, and to walk according to their rules, was admitted to the Christian society. *We know* that in the earliest church there existed the strangest varieties of belief ; but the point to observe is, that union and belief, so far as it existed, was *the result* of belonging to the society rather than a previous condition required for belonging to it.” Common sense surely teaches that if we are to copy the first churches in one particular, we must copy them, not, indeed, in every detail, but in all leading principles. We must grasp their idea *as a whole*, or we shall never be able to understand the parts of which it is composed. Merely to exchange the calm thought of an instructed mind, however dull or dry the speaker, for the exaggerated utterances sometimes of

the ignorant, and sometimes of the weak and enthusiastic, would be a poor exchange indeed.

The great and significant fact, that in the apostolic churches we find open teaching and open thought side by side, has recently been brought out and established *historically*, and without reference to any of our modern opinions, by Mr. Donaldson, in his "Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine," the first volume of which has just been published.

"In the case of the apostles," he says,—and the same thing is true of their immediate successors,—"everything was made subsidiary to moral and spiritual improvement. The idea of happiness, and every other such notion, pass entirely out of sight in their anxious longing for complete holiness, for living, as they called it, for Him who was The Life. . . . In theology there is not the slightest attempt to systematize; there is the most absolute belief of certain great truths; there is a determined, unwavering confidence in Christ as the author and finisher of their faith. But there is not the remotest desire to unravel the puzzles which afterwards beset the theological world. There is in their childlike faith an utter unconsciousness of them.

"Thus they speak of Christ invariably as one individual being. They knew He was the Son of God. They knew He was real man. But it was the Son of God that became man, just as the child and the grown-up man are the same being. *How* this took place,—whether He had two natures or Wills,—in what metaphysical relation He stood to the God and Father of all,—these, and many such questions, never occupied their minds.

"So, again, in regard to Christ's death. They knew that Christ did die to take away their sins and to bring them to

God. They knew that He, in His death, did conquer death. They knew that He had stripped the principalities and powers of the air of their dominion; but *how* His death could effect such a grand revolution in the souls of men, and in the relations of the universe to man, this was a question which did not occupy their minds. And, indeed, it might be easy to show that they had a strong disinclination to any such speculations."

Not till the ministry of the Church, as *distinguished from*, although including, that of the pastor, can be revived on these principles, will it ever work so as to promote the great end for which it was ordained. As matters stand, it is absurd to say that it has ever been tried and has failed.

Bearing these preliminary remarks in mind, the reader will now, I hope, be able to understand what I mean in saying that the Church of this generation needs, for its true spiritual revival, *four* things:—

(1) The separation from its worship and teaching of the ignorant and unconverted.

(2) The re-establishment *in spirit*, and as far as practicable, of the Apostolic Pastorate.

(3) A wider and truer communion of all believers.

(4) An open ministry, for the mutual instruction, training, and education of the Church.

Let us notice each of these particulars in turn.

In relation to the first, so far at least as change bears on the spiritual interests of the thoughtless and ungodly, I have already spoken at length. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that the mischief which is involved in the *mixing up* of divers characters in public worship *ends* with the injury it inflicts on the ungodly. Far from

it. Public teaching loses, *for all of us*, much of its power from that absence of singleness of purpose and definiteness of aim which necessarily characterizes addresses intended to act at the same time on different classes. Hence it not unfrequently happens that exhortations which are addressed to persons in diametrically opposite states of mind are, in fact, unadapted to either.

For the most part, I suppose *the leading thought* of an earnest minister is the conversion of the careless hearer; since both pulpit address and textual discourse have been introduced mainly with that end. Subordinate to this primary view, and next in importance, the development of religious feeling in those who have been more or less impressed, and the instruction of the children of religious families, is probably kept in view,—an object which again implies, as a rule, the merest elementary teaching. The perfecting of the believer—the advancement of the renewed soul in Divine knowledge—instruction in the deep things of God—a going on from what St. Paul calls laying the foundation, to higher truth, however much desired by a godly pastor, is *impossible* under the conditions; for I cannot admit that the highly Calvinistic teaching which consists largely of merely human inferences, sustained by the most fanciful interpretations of Scripture, is in any sense worthy of being called “deep teaching.”

But here, again, I would rather proceed on the opinion of others than on my own judgment.

“We believe,” says a living and popular writer, who has dealt with no little success with the subject of practical religion, “that the office of the ministry being twofold—to rouse consciences and to guide them,—we have, for a long time past in the National Church (and probably it is the same with the sects), contented ourselves with rousing,

while we have done scarcely anything to guide them. The one object of all our teaching, whether in formal sermons or in books, has been *to make impressions*, not to give them a right direction when made.

“An eminent prelate, who, it may be assumed, is well acquainted with the kind of preaching prevalent among the several theological schools in his own church, after speaking, in a recent charge to his clergy, of the foundation of character being well and truly laid by the teaching of the Christian faith, proceeds to ask, ‘But where is the superstructure? where is the building up? who supplies the strong meat after the milk? who disciplines and guides the awakened conscience? who enters into the detail of Christian duty? who teaches to observe all things which the Lord Jesus has commanded?’ ”*

In short, for this is the substance of the complaint, the practice of the Church is, generally speaking, directly the reverse of the rule laid down by the Lord. He says, “To him that *hath* shall be given.” We say, “Let us give to him that *hath* not.” Nor can it be otherwise, so long as we continue to blend in one service what we call the preaching of the Gospel to the careless and ungodly with the education and training of the believer.

I have next to show what I mean by saying that we need the revival of THE APOSTOLIC PASTORATE.

For this office, something more and something different from a preacher, however able, is required. What we really want in a pastor is “*a man brought nearer than other men are at once to man and to God.*” The human heart, says a recent writer, “desires one who is greater, purer, kinder,

* Quoted from the Inaugural Address already referred to.

freer than itself,—one standing aloof from its conscious falseness, its self-confessed littleness. It must be a life having something sacrificial in it,—something which will oftentimes compel the man to put a space between his own soul and the souls upon which his desires and prayers are set; he must free himself from every disturbing element, and be content to depart from his brethren in many things and at many seasons, so that he may abide with them for ever in a truer, deeper fellowship than any which is founded upon the conditions of an earthly amity. Unsecularity is the strength and glory of the Christian priesthood; the agency they deal with is one which, like that of some great mechanic force, must work *apart* from that on which it is brought to bear; its power is lost in conformity; it lives in transformation—in renewal; it is content to die in its own individual hopes and interests, so that, falling within the wide field of humanity, it may, in dying, bring forth much fruit.”*

Such a man, relieved from the necessity of making sermons without end, and freed from all undue pressure of other obligations, whether philanthropic or religious, *would have time*, and would therefore be expected to live much in quiet meditation; to cultivate the “meekness of wisdom,” rather than brilliancy of talent; *to be*, as well as to teach, what the Christian life requires of us all.

Chosen, as in this case he would be, not for his eloquence, his zeal, or his learning, so much as for his sanctified good sense, his gentleness of character, his sweetness of disposition, his quick sympathy, his holiness of life, and his moral power over others, he would move among his people with the tenderness and love of the

* “The Two Friends,” by the author of “The Patience of Hope.”

nurse who cherisheth her children, and would enter in no slight degree into the experience of that great apostle who could say to his converts, "I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

But how is it possible for the modern minister to do this, *trained* as he is, *chosen* as he is, *imagining* as he does that all ministry belongs exclusively to himself; that however young or however inexperienced he may be, he stands in the pulpit "monarch of all he surveys,"—the world and the Church alike depending on him, and him alone, for warning, exhortation, and instruction, as well as for leadership and guidance in all the varied forms of Christian effort?

Perhaps it is not too much to say that scarcely any position can be found which is so manifestly a false one as that of the modern minister. "Is he the object of admiration?" says Dr. Caird; "then a general atmosphere of deference surrounds him, very pleasant to a weak mind, not unpleasant to a strong one." Do crowds hang on his lips?—"what an ordeal is this for a weak head and a vain heart to go through! *There is inherent weakness* in such a ministry, amid the superficial flutter of success."*

But reverse the picture. Is he unpopular?—how trying is his position! What scorn, what humiliation has he frequently to endure! How often is he by poverty and the claims of a young family chained to his post, even as a martyr is chained to the stake! How greatly would such a man be cheered and strengthened if others were by his side to help and to sustain him; if those whom he taught were looking for instruction rather than for excitement, for sense rather than for sound, for learning and piety rather than for eloquence, for truth rather than for the gratification of a tickled ear!

* Sermon at the ordination of Mr. Burns, of Glasgow.

But this is not all. A ministry of the Church, *wisely regulated*, would do more than anything else towards the removal of one of the greatest moral dangers involved in the obligation to act as the sole recognized public teacher of a religious body, viz., that which arises when doubts come over the mind as to the exact truthfulness of anything hitherto believed, or the rightfulness of any particular course which has been long followed. For then *action might be suspended until the doubt was solved*. The absence of a provision for this end demoralizes the existing ministry to an extent which it is not easy to calculate.

I am not slandering any one in thus speaking, nor am I talking at random. More than forty years ago the late John Foster thus wrote:—"A number not large, but of *great piety and intelligence*, of ministers within my acquaintance have been *disbelievers* of the doctrine of eternal punishment; at the same time, *not feeling themselves imperatively called upon to make a public disavowal*, they content themselves with employing, in their ministrations, strong general terms in denouncing the doom of impenitent sinners." How widely this system of *reserve* has since spread may be gathered from a recent avowal in one of our orthodox magazines, that "in our time there is much reserve and dissimulation." * * * "All who know religious society," says the writer, "know that *the people are greatly deluded as to the real opinions of their ministers*. There is a fear of the Jews, which leads men to hide their profound convictions, and temporize with the multitude."

But what does God think of this course? "He," as has been well said, "*insists upon having a correspondence*" between our convictions and our speech, quite as peremptorily as He does upon a like correspondence between our faith and our conduct; and if we teach the thing we

more than half believe to be untrue, "He proceeds to abolish the discord *by letting down our thought to the level of our speech,*" just as under similar conditions He often reduces a man's ideal to the level of his life.

Never was the loss that is sustained by the Church at large from the absence of any available channel through which new forms of thought might be brought under notice, and handled in a devout spirit, more felt than at the present moment. We do not want a court of decision,—that would be a great evil,—but we do want a tribunal, not clerical, before which disputed points might be examined and discussed in a spirit of love,—if needful, *for years*, judgment being kept in abeyance until the truth could be satisfactorily ascertained. Churches ought, in some degree at least, to supply this great need.

Next to an Apostolic Pastorate, A WIDER AND TRUER COMMUNION OF ALL BELIEVERS is our greatest want.

If I read the Divine record aright, the *first* duty of a man, when he is made by the grace of God—whatever may have been the instrumentality—a "new creature in Christ Jesus," is, to study diligently the written Word, in order to see what God would have him *to become*; to learn how he may best make his "calling and election sure;" how, with "fear and trembling," he may most speedily and effectually "work out his salvation" from sin and sinful habits.

His next duty is to let his "light so *shine before men,*" that they, seeing his "good works, may glorify his Father who is in heaven." This light, in proportion as it gains fresh power from the study of Scripture, and the indwelling of the Spirit, is to "*shine more and more* unto the perfect day."

If the Christian be the head of a family, it is emphatically to shine *there*. He is to "walk before his household with a perfect heart;" to rule it wisely and well; to "command his children after him."

In business the light is *to be visible* to all men. In society it is to illuminate the social circle,—“all who are in the house.” In the world at large it is to be manifested by a gravity, a thoughtful seriousness, a sweetness of temper, and a profitableness of demeanour, *unusual* and therefore noticeable.

But in order to be what God wills we should become, *communion with other Christians* is, if not essential, highly needful. Our spiritual life is to be quickened and strengthened by intercourse with those who are better and stronger than ourselves, while we in turn are to render to fellow-Christians, and especially to the young and inexperienced, all that help, both material and moral, which is implied in the apostolic command, “Bear ye one another’s burdens.” From the context the *moral weaknesses* of others would seem to be the burdens chiefly referred to by the Apostle.

True Christian communion is one of the most pressing wants of the human spirit. We all need to be refreshed and enriched by others—to be quickened by something that is not within ourselves. Heart must act on heart, and life on life. The *religious poor* especially need spiritual sympathy to make up for the want of that ordinary intercourse with educated Christians which is hindered by the artificial distinctions of civilized life. In a true Church-life alone can this be had; for, as it has been truly observed, “the Christian belongs to a kingdom in which there is nothing unrelated. *There no man liveth and no man dieth to himself.*”

How this communion can, in a state of society like our own, become a reality—a living thing—it is hard indeed to say; to imagine that it is as yet realized to any extent, either among Churchmen or Dissenters, is simply to deceive ourselves; to attempt to base it on denominational preferences, on common opinions, or on religious interests, is absurd; to regard it as consisting in the recital of spiritual experiences, as involving a pecuniary subscription to some good object, or as developing itself under regulations of a more or less inquisitorial kind, is to mistake altogether its true character. A common and heartfelt love to the living Christ, rising above all sectarian narrowness,—a deep and earnest interest in “the Book” which reveals His will,—a certain amount of natural affinity in disposition,—some opportunity of intercourse,—more or less community of taste and feeling,—all these things seem necessary to anything like true communion, the most distant approach to which, as a result of Church fellowship, is at present very rare, and perhaps only exists in individual cases, where casual acquaintance has ripened into friendship, and a confidence been generated which has opened two hearts at once.

The nearest approximation to *Church* communion will probably be found in certain limited Nonconformist fellowships, where the members are very much of the same rank in life, about equal in education, and united by common objects of interest, leading to a not infrequent social intercourse. But among these, as a rule, *narrowness* of thought and feeling reigns supreme; and it may well be questioned whether, in these cases, the intensification of denominational interests and sectarian differences does not more than counterbalance any good which may arise out of them. Tea-drinkings, speeches, and innocent gossip are

all very well in their place, and not without their use; far better, indeed, than that meddling with other men's matters by "busybodies"—that prying into other people's affairs which marks some of these small churches; but whether good or evil, these things are not *spiritual helps*,—there is nothing *elevating* about them, and they are at best but a mockery of true communion.

Alas! a *blight* seems to rest on almost every attempt we make to realize the living and the true. How far a more apostolic pastorate, and a ministry of the Church taking the form of mutual instruction, and directed to the ennobling of character rather than to the elucidation of doctrine, might tend to bring about any change for the better, experience alone can teach.

For public worship, as conducted among ourselves,—for attendance at church or chapel,—for religious establishments,—for denominational fellowships,—for what is called "sitting under a stated ministry," no warrant, as I believe, can be discovered in Scripture. Still less will it be found possible to find there any justification for calling these places of worship (*as is perpetually done both in praise and prayer*) houses of God, tabernacles of the Most High, temples, and sanctuaries; or for using language regarding them appropriate only on the theory that God *peculiarly* manifests Himself in a church or chapel, and that such a building is really and truly Zion, "the hill of the Lord," "the holy place." On what other supposition can a Christian, when absent from these assemblies, say, "My soul thirsteth for God. *When shall I come and appear before God?*" "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may *dwell in Thy courts*: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy

house, even of Thy *holy temple*"? It may be said that these terms do not *mean* anything more than the recognition of the fact that "where two or three" meet together in the name of Christ, there He is to bless; but if it be so, then the greater the pity they should be allowed to *mislead* so many, as they certainly do.

Yet with all their defects, whether established or voluntary, bond or free, these existing institutions are, I doubt not, doing Christ's work, though imperfectly and feebly. In my view of things, *all of them*—though widely differing in character and in value—stand essentially on the same foundation. They are expedients for the sustentation and spread of religion, instituted with the best intentions, and existing, as I have already said, not without evidence of a Divine blessing on all who have *therein* laboured honestly for God; but alike proceeding on the unscriptural assumption that the Lord has called His Church to the task of evangelizing the world; that Christianity is intended, by this agency, one day to overcome all resistance, and to triumph gloriously; that Christian civilization and the spread of religiousness, while not religion, is nevertheless one main object of the Redeemer's advent; and that the Gospel itself is sent down from heaven to adorn and beautify the world quite as much as *to take out of it* a small and peculiar people.

That Divine truth is both intended and adapted *to improve* many whom it fails to regenerate; that it actually does this, and that in so doing it elevates society as a whole, is beyond question. Nor ought we for a moment either to undervalue these secondary influences, or to disparage their promoters. He that is not against us is for us, saith the Lord. Let those, then, who cannot attain to a higher conception of Christianity than that which now

prevails, by all means go on with their work, and do all they can to benefit and bless their neighbours by church and chapel building, by public worship, and by such other national or voluntary efforts as may to them seem most likely to secure the end they have in view.

But let them not imagine that those who adopt other views, and who strive rather after the Christian perfection of the few than the general improvement of the many, *therefore* do nothing for society at large. This is not the fact; for it is unquestionable that all the *secondary influences* of Christianity depend for their force much more on the influence of individual example than either on religious rites or public teaching. The performance of rites may be, and frequently is, but a cloak to hypocrisy. Teaching, however good, too generally resembles the action of the sun on desert plains, it falls on unpropitious soil. But the influence of example, if it acts at all, is not only in itself quickening and life-giving, *it suggests the source* from whence all that is good proceeds.

Supposing, then,—although this is by no means a legitimate supposition,—that “the ministry of the Church” should be altogether unaccompanied by any direct action on those that are without, it would still remain true that *indirect influences* of the most powerful kind would be continually going forth on all around, since we ever live under the necessity to become ourselves, and to make others, better or worse, accordingly as we individually elevate or depress the standard of public opinion. But this is a very different thing from cherishing the notion that such general improvement is to be produced by the spread of a religiousness which is not religion, or by dreams that the earth can ever be regenerated without absolute submission to its rightful Lord.

Believing that all our existing Christian institutions rest more or less on this false basis, I cannot but conclude that they will one day utterly break down. The things that *are* will not always be. "Every plant that the heavenly Father hath not planted will be rooted up" (Matt. xv. 13). But it is not for man to anticipate Divine decisions. The Lord Jesus well knew that the end of the Jewish dispensation was determined; but He did nothing to overthrow it. The disciples, after His departure, were not ignorant that its priesthood had been superseded by the great High Priest who had passed into the heavens; that its sacrifices had found their signification in the one offering made once for all; that the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit had presented Himself without spot to God, could alone purge the conscience; yet, under Divine guidance, they refrained from uttering a word that was likely to bring Jewish ordinances into contempt; they still frequented the temple, and shared in all the services of the old economy; and it was not till most of them had passed away from earth that God swept off the whole, and rendered conformity no longer possible. Such must be our course if we would imitate inspired example, and in our researches after truth, as well as in our grasp and treatment of it when found, walk humbly before God and tenderly before men.

It is not improbable that we are ourselves living in a transition period, in some respects resembling that in which the lot of the apostles was cast. We seem to be approaching, if not the close of a dispensation, at least the termination of a great era, during which evil and good have strangely intermingled *in the Church*; intermingled, not as they do in everything human, not as they did in the apostolic churches, not as they ever will do while man is frail

and perverse, but in the structure of the Church itself,—in its teachings, in its organization, in its life; intermingling so cunningly that it is often difficult to discern the true from the false, the children of light from the children of darkness; intermingling in such fashion as to darken truth, to destroy witness, and to deprave the very bride of Christ.

This cannot last for ever. The voice of prophecy and the finger of Providence seem to combine in showing that the time of the end is near. In what form that end will approach, by what events it will be heralded, what precise changes it will effect, are as yet hidden in great measure from mortal eye. But whether the coming time should prove *immediately* disastrous or encouraging, this at least is certain, it will be *progress* in the right direction, since in any case it will hasten the coming of the Lord, and end in the universal triumph of His cause.

The only question for us is,—How is this future to be met? What are we to do in order to pioneer its approach? To this there can be but one answer. We must, as far as possible, and as speedily, remove all hindrances out of the way,—everything that is felt to be an impediment to growth in grace; a removal to be effected only *according to the pattern* showed us by the Lord,—viz., by planting *underneath* that which is ready to vanish away, something more in accordance with the Divine will, and better adapted to sustain and invigorate the spiritual life. If we do this, the shock of change will be broken, and nothing will perish except that which has become useless or injurious.

In proceeding in this direction our first inquiry must be, What has God ordained? All other things will come right if we can but ascertain *that*, and if we are but willing

to follow the appointed path. Surely we have our model, if anywhere, in the Primitive Church—established, as it was, by inspired men, and declared to be “the body of Christ,” the “communion of saints,” the “light of the world,” the witness-bearing society, distinguished chiefly by its meekness and patience, its purity and brotherly love. Here we come, I imagine, as near to the *beau idéal* of the Church in all ages as we are likely to do, and have little more to learn as to its teaching and government than is presented to us in Scripture.

Very insignificant may such a position seem to men now; for, stripped of apostolic guidance, and of miraculous gifts, the earliest Christian communities present little that is attractive to modern eyes. Very quiet and retired they are; singularly loose from the world and its interests; affording—so, at least, they appear to us—little scope for any form of human ambition, although not wanting in moral power over those who come within their range.

What modern religious society would be, if constituted after this pattern, may be imagined, but can scarcely be realized. The ready hand, the liberal heart, the loving disposition, would certainly not seek in vain for opportunities of doing good. But benevolence would be more *individual* than it is now. Each man for himself would ask of God more earnestly than he does at present, for *his own precise work* in the world, and would try to do *that* as simply and as disinterestedly as he could. He might unite with others in some common work of beneficence, but it would be as silently as possible.

Public meetings to excite the feelings of a mixed crowd, and to draw forth their money, would be unknown. Platform speeches, having no higher end in view than this, would be regarded as an abomination. “Reports” of good supposed

to be done would be odious. Machinery in all spiritual work would be dispensed with to the utmost possible extent. As a rule, each man would be his own almoner, and instead of seeking to do good with the money of others, would shrink from its appropriation.

Above all, and this would regulate action, Christian men would learn to *rest* in God ; to be satisfied with the Divine government of the world, whether success or failure attended their endeavours to do good in it ; and perchance they might then be preserved from imagining that *their* presentation of the Gospel, whether from the Pulpit or the Press, must of necessity be so clear and convincing that neglect of the message is as likely to be fatal as if it had been preached by an Apostle or warranted by miracle. They might then at length learn to realize a truth that few now care to remember, viz., that human speech for God, however earnest and affectionate, is not necessarily accompanied by Divine power, or by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven ; that the Lord alone has access to the hearts of men, and that what does not touch the spirit is but as the clanging of brass, or the sounding of a cymbal.

CHAPTER IX.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

THE English are a practical people—perhaps too much so,—inasmuch as they commonly estimate the value of any suggestion that may be offered to them, rather by its apparent immediate practicability and usefulness, than by its abstract wisdom or truth. This is not right; but since the habit in question is a recognized national characteristic, it is necessary that all who seek to guide public opinion should so far bow to it as to show at least the *possibility* of carrying into effect that which they recommend.

However true, therefore, in the abstract may be the observations which I have thought it right to make in relation to the ministry of the Church, I am fully conscious that little attention will be paid to them unless it can be shown that such a ministry would *work*, supposing only there existed amongst us a conviction of its value, and a willingness to put it to the test.

Those who doubt will probably refuse to go farther until the following questions are answered:—

(1) What Order of Worship would be essential to the carrying out of a regulated open ministry?

(2) In what way, or by what test, would it be possible to separate the godly from the ungodly in public worship of any kind?

(3) What reason is there to suppose that educated persons could be induced to take part in public teaching, or that, without a special theological training, laymen would be qualified to do so ?

(4) What provision, in the absence of ordinary sermons, could be made for the Christian instruction of our children ?

I will endeavour to answer these questions *seriatim*.

The *Order of Worship* need not, I imagine, be very different from that which obtains at a modern Communion Service. It would be marked by a similar quietness and oneness of feeling, by the absence of all exciting discourse, by a partial intermingling of silent prayer, and by a deeper reverence of demeanour than is ordinarily observed. These would, in all probability, be its chief characteristics.

As the instruction of the community would be sought, not, as now, in a sustained public discourse from an appointed preacher ; not by anything at all in the form of an oration ; but by such simple and colloquial teaching, from one or more, as might seem best adapted to meet practical wants, to guide conscience, to elucidate the meaning of Scripture, and to direct hearers in their own private and personal study of the Word of God, a gallery or platform, rather than a pulpit, would be required.

The minister, or presiding elder, would of course be regarded as *generally responsible* for the orderly conduct of the meeting, although, whether separated altogether from secular occupations and wholly sustained for the service of the Church or not, he would, in no case where it could be avoided, *exclusively assume* the entire instruction of the assembly. Others—one or more, as gifts might be developed and recognized in the body—would be expected to be by his side and to take their share, both in the worship and teaching

of the Church. I do not know that any other change would be needful in what is termed the Order of Worship.

On the second question—the separating of classes—conscience must be left to do its own work. Any attempt on the part of man to distinguish between believers and unbelievers, between the converted and the unconverted, is, I think, to be earnestly deprecated. The true, perhaps the only effectual guard against the intrusion of the ungodly into spiritual services of any kind, is *the creation of an atmosphere* too pure to be enjoyed by those who have no taste for the beauties of holiness. This seems to have been the only valid protection of the Christian community in apostolic times. Of irreligious, heretical, or inconsistent persons—“antichrists”—it is simply said, “They *went out* from us (not driven out) because they were not of us” (1 John ii. 19).

That beyond this, or rather for the checking of sinful habits in those who were really one with them, there was “a rod” for flagrant offenders is plain enough (1 Cor. iv. 21); but since it was exclusively apostolic, and implied the exercise of miraculous power (1 Cor. v. 5; xi. 30), it necessarily passed away with those who alone could wield it. Whatever might be the case in apostolic days, however, it is certain that in our own the surest way to keep worship pure would be to abstract therefrom whatever is attractive to the unrenewed mind *as such*; to exclude from it everything that irreligious persons, *while irreligious*, are likely either to estimate or to relish; to abstain from all that does not require a spiritual faculty to understand and appreciate.

Let exciting oratory and imposing ritualism disappear from public worship; let appeals and addresses be no longer delivered, which take for granted that a large portion of the

congregation consists of persons who are present only as *attendants* on what is called, but very improperly, *the means of grace*; let instrumental music be discouraged, and that which is vocal made thoroughly subservient to the praise of God; let buildings, while neat and clean, be unadorned; let all that is now *intended* to attract the eye, to regale the ear, to gratify taste, or to produce mere intellectual satisfaction, be omitted; let teaching proceed on the Lord's own principle, that "to him *that hath* shall be given," whether the amount of truth possessed be little or much; let it always presuppose in the hearer an intelligent acquaintance with Holy Scripture, and more or less of capacity for its spiritual appreciation; above all, let believers cease to encourage the notion that attendance at church or chapel is, if not religion itself, at least *the nearest approach to it* that an unconverted man can make, and there would be little fear that unsuitable persons would attempt to unite in a communion which could have no charm *for them*, or that they would desire to mingle in a fellowship, the very nature of which they would, to a great extent, be incapable of appreciating. Hypocrites under any circumstances would occasionally be found: this is unavoidable; there was one among the twelve.

Ignorant, careless, and profane persons might, indeed, enter the assembly, nor should they, even if it were possible, be formally excluded. God may have a message either for a persecutor or a blasphemer. "If, therefore, the whole Church be come together into one place," and men "come in that are unteachable or unbelieving," let us hope that such, as of old, may be "convinced of all and judged of all," and thus, as the secrets of their hearts are "made manifest," be led to "worship God, and confess that He is in us of a truth" (1 Cor. xiv. 24). For true service, like the prophecy

or the tongues of early times, while edifying the believer, is "for a sign to them that believe not." But surely this is a very different thing from *inviting* such to our assemblies, or *adapting* our services to their supposed tastes or need.

But some will say—Can this reasoning be made to apply to the Communion of the Supper, which it is supposed would frequently form an important part of the service of the Church? I think it can. I see no reason why, if bread were broken in memory of the Lord, there should be any fencing of the table, as it is called. Why should we wish to keep back any who may desire to commemorate the dying love of the Redeemer? Why should we still connect with the simple ordinance of love anything either mystic or terrible?

Nonconformists, for good reasons, object to kneeling at the Communion table, and still more to the consecration of the bread and wine with a view to its administration by the Priest's hands; but even *they* draw a wide distinction between asking a layman to pray and permitting him "to dispense the ordinance," as it is termed. Yet, why should the one be regarded as a more ministerial act than the other? Why, too, on their own principles, objecting, as they do, to all symbolism, should the minister break the bread in the sight of the communicants because Christ did so, and as he hands the elements to the deacon, utter the Lord's words *as if he were at that moment representing Him*? If this be an implied claim to *give* the bread and wine a wrong thought is involved.

Let us, then, not shrink from following apostolic example. Let us, like the first Churches, cease to draw any line between communion with Christ through the symbols of bread and wine, and communion with Him through praise and prayer. For if it be true, as indeed it is, that "he who eateth and drinketh unworthily,"—that is, profanely,—“not

discerning the Lord's body, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself" (1 Cor. xi. 29), it is also true that the prayer of the wicked (hypocritical prayer) is an abomination to the Lord (Prov. xxviii. 9), and equally certain that the praise which is heartless can never be anything better than a solemn mockery.

That which the late Dr. Chalmers so wisely recommended to the Evangelical Alliance admits of the widest application. 'Do not attempt,' he said, 'any means of separation with a view to promote purity; precautions for this end are quite needless, and often mischievous. Your devotional services, if they are what they ought to be, will prove both centripetal and centrifugal forces; they will *attract* to you all who are really *of* you—they will as certainly repel those who are not.' The fact that profane persons do now not unfrequently approach the table of the Lord in churches where no hindrance is placed in the way, arises from the sad fact that communion was for many years enforced by law—"a picklock to a place"—and that it is still in some quarters regarded superstitiously.

I know very well how strong an objection will be felt by many good people to give up the supposed right of deciding as to whether or no any given individual, desiring communion, has experienced that inward change which is usually denominated conversion. Such persons cannot see, and will not be persuaded that the very attempt to give evidence to others of spiritual life leads, almost of necessity, to a constraint and self-consciousness which is anything but wholesome; that it occasions *danger*, were it only from the fact that a candidate for admission almost always imagines that a certain standard of feeling must be maintained, whether natural or not; that wherever there is stimulus or pressure there is sure to be collapse; and that whatever

lays stress on a particular order of thought and feeling "*casts the heart too much on itself*," and in so doing leads it away from Christ.

Nor is this all. Any attempt to be spiritual *up to a certain standard*, supposed to be attained by a given religious body, endangers sincerity and promotes doubt. Artificial stimulants are in such a case almost always employed, and the result, even when there is no hypocrisy, is to produce a state of mind under which the soul narrows and withers.

The error lies in our trying to do what God only can accomplish, viz., to judge the state of the heart of our brother. What we are really called upon to do is, to return to the apostolic practice of receiving Christians to our affections and to our fellowships, *simply because they are professedly such*; valuing each only for what he is, or, rather, for what he has been made by his faith; "warning every man" in love against whatever we may regard as questionable, whether in his opinions or in his conduct; but never excluding him either from our communion or our hearts, because he does not follow our counsels.

Instead, therefore, of attempting, either in prayer or in communion, to exclude the unworthy, let us be sure,—for we safely may,—that if we are what we ought to be, and our worship is spiritual, they who are not of us will very speedily go from us.

The sum, then, of what I have to say on separation is this:—In a country like our own, where the knowledge of Divine truth is so widely extended, every congregation will, as a fact, be found to consist of *three classes*; viz., of renewed and living Christians; of persons more or less instructed in religion—more or less desirous of being conformed to the will of God; and of absolutely irreligious persons, whether formalists, hypocrites, or profane.

For the first and last of these classes we are bound specially to provide,—*for the first*, a service adapted only to spiritual minds, and proceeding altogether on the supposition that the individuals uniting in it are among the renewed children of God ; *for the last*, a proclamation of the Gospel, separated from religious worship altogether. For the great middle class no distinct provision should be made, and for this reason : God only can tell whether such persons have really given themselves to Him or not. Man, being unable to read the heart, is altogether incapable of forming any right judgment in such cases. Every facility, therefore, must be given for the operation of conscience, more or less enlightened by the Spirit of God, on each person included in the class referred to, since this Divine Monitor alone can decide the question.

Nor will He fail to do so if not hindered from without. Worship, if it be really spiritual, is *in itself a test*, and if it include within it no element adapted to a worldly state of mind will soon come either to be sought and valued for its own sake, or to be shunned as distasteful. The Holy Spirit will then do what man cannot. He will search the heart, and separate, not publicly, but in secret, “one from another, even as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats.”

But this process is one with which it ill becomes man to interfere, and in which he rarely meddles without doing mischief. He *does interfere*, and consequently does harm and not good, when, on the one hand, he shuts out from communion all who cannot, in some way or other, prove *to his satisfaction* that they are real Christians ; and he does so, on the other hand, when he provides a service in which multitudes may join, as they often do, through a lifetime, without ever feeling either repose in Christ or dissatisfac-

tion with themselves—living without their spiritual life, if they have had one, having ever been recognized either by themselves or by others, and dying under circumstances which alike forbid either assurance or despair.

To the objection that without special training laymen would be incapable of teaching, I reply that, if separated from continued and lengthened discourse on the one hand, and from scientific theology on the other—the two great hindrances to good,—no *peculiar* instruction is needful in order to benefit others.

That educated men among the laity would for some time shrink from taking any part in public teaching, I think very probable. The *best* will never come forward except from a sense of duty and of positive obligation, *which has yet to be created*. Yet few, I suppose, will be prepared to deny that such men, if thoughtful students of Scripture, would, in many respects, be *better qualified* to expound the Word, and, under the teachings of experience, to apply its lessons to the hearts and consciences of their brethren, than, shall I say, *the great mass* of those who, in or out of the Established Church, from time to time assume the pastoral office.

Vinet observes that “the occupations most unconnected with Christian speculation, provided they do not oppose Christian morality, are *less likely* to distract the soul from what should be its first object here below. It is often,” he adds, “far better, as regards the religious life of the heart, to be a merchant, an artist, a geometrician, than a theologian. The *exclusive* application of the intellect to religion, not only fails to bring us nearer to the truth,—that is, to the life,—but it actually tends to remove us farther and farther from it.” It is quite possible to go on “learning ever better and better how to give account of the effects of truth upon the

soul," and to become at the same time ever "more and more incapable of experiencing those effects" one's self; to write on "the *order of grace*" while "the heart grows more and more hardened against the influence of grace;" and to enlarge on facts until they "become phantoms." There can be no room for doubt that the marriage of ministry to secular life would be in all respects a blessing.

Not, however, till the wise and thoughtful few,—not till the simple-hearted and the devout, the disinterested and the upright, have examined this question carefully, and weighed without prejudice what may be advanced in relation to the duty of educated men to take part in ministry; not till such an amount of moral force has been generated in its favour as will insure its *working well* in a society so tenacious of the past as is that in which our lot is cast, will the right men be secured. Nor is it desirable that before then the attempt should be made. Without the governing power which an informed public sentiment exercises over bodies of men, whether few or many, change would be disastrous; and open ministry, if unsustained by the educated and the retiring, would be but the triumph of anarchy, of conceit, of ignorance, or of self-will. *Wisely ordered*, nothing but good could result from such an endeavour to bring the cultivated religious thought of the Church into contact with Scripture on the one hand, and the Christian community on the other.

Let it not be said that laymen are unfit to be judges of theological truth. This is not true. But if it were, they *would soon be trained* to become such by the obligation to teach being thrown upon them. Dr. Arnold, in his lectures on Modern History, has a striking passage on trial by jury, which, with very little modification, may be made to apply to the case before us. He says, "To accustom a number of

persons to the intelligent exercise of attending to, and weighing and comparing, evidence, and to the moral exercise of being placed in a high and responsible situation, invested with one of God's own attributes, that of judgment, and having to determine with authority between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, is to furnish them with very high means of moral and intellectual culture; in other words, it is providing them with one of the highest kinds of education. It may not always succeed in obtaining the greatest certainty of just legal decisions, but *it educates a large portion of the nation.*"

To teach theology as it has been taught, a special training may be necessary; but to teach scriptural truth, which is quite a different thing, no such professional education is needful. Nor can there be any doubt, that if the obligation to do so were felt, the learning now consecrated to secular professions—to law, to medicine, or to literature—would speedily *be supplemented* by the study of the New Testament, *for the purpose of teaching it*; since what is now commonly regarded as an intrusion into another man's office, would then be demanded as righteous service. It is mere folly to suppose that gifts will ever be developed in a Church which makes no provision for their exercise.

To those who hold that God has exclusively committed all teaching in the Church *to a class*, episcopally or otherwise ordained, appointed by presbyters, or authorized by conferences, all that I have been saying will go for nothing. To those who have been taught to believe that training in a denominational college, the possession of a given scheme or system of theology, the holding of certain opinions relative to baptism or pædo-baptism, fluency of speech, or some other similar qualification, endorsed by popular choice, is essential to the exercise of ministry, I shall probably be "as

one that dreameth." By those, on the other hand, who have meditated on the habits and practices of the Apostolic Church; by those who believe that this Church was not a mere seed, hereafter to be developed into a hierarchy, but a perfect model of its kind; by those who have pondered the fact that the gift of tongues descended at Pentecost, not on the Apostles only, but on the whole Church, both male and female (Acts ii. 1—4); that the Divine donation was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel, breaking down official distinctions, and vouchsafed in order that both servants and handmaidens, "all flesh," might prophesy (Acts ii. 17, 18); that after the persecution about Stephen "they that were scattered abroad"—all classes—"went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts viii. 4); and that in later days the warning needed was, "My brethren, be not many teachers" (Jas. iii. 1),—some things I have said will, I am sure, be deemed worthy of consideration, and eventually, I doubt not, bring forth good fruit.

Anything, surely, is better than a system which practically denies the existence of any God-sent teachers at all, since it is based on the supposed right of a patron to appoint, or of a people to select, their own spiritual instructor; since it requires the hearer either to *submit* to whoever may be sent him, or to *support* that particular ministry *which most accurately reflects his own opinions*; since it justifies him—if a Nonconformist—in discharging, separating from, or starving out any teacher who deviates from what is conventionally regarded as the truth; since it bids him found and sustain colleges to train ministers to teach in accordance with the views of the sect or party to which he may belong; and since it forbids any change of view in a minister so long as he occupies the pulpit allotted to him. A more ingenious device for stereotyping thought; for

crushing the growth of any newly discovered truth ; for silencing testimony ; for perpetuating our own errors and prejudices, the wit of man or the subtlety of Satan never yet devised or carried out.*

And now the question comes,—“What is to be done for our children if the educational influences of the church and chapel are to be withdrawn ; if our little ones are no longer to be wooed and won by the voice of the pastor ; if they are no more to be instructed, invited, or entreated *in sermons* ; if they are not to be trained in *habits of piety* by public services of prayer and praise ?”

* The ablest preacher that the age has produced thus writes about sermons :—“Sermons are crutches,—*I believe often the worst things for spiritual health that ever were invented.*” Again : “They enfeeble the strong.” Speaking of “*impressive*” discourses, he says,—“I see what rhetoric does, and what it seems to do, and I thoroughly despise it. I think it makes people worse instead of better ; exposes the feelings to tension, like the pulling constantly of a spring backward, until the spring loses its elasticity, becomes weak, or breaks ; and yet perhaps I do it an injustice.” Again : “Nothing *demoralizes* (in the military sense) so much as excitement. It destroys the tone of the heart, leaves an exhaustion which craves stimulus, and utterly unfits for duty.” . . . “Religious people are generally—at least the so-called religious—the *weakest* of mankind.” Speaking of his own ministry, he says,—“I cannot even rejoice without fear, for I confess that at best pulpit instruction seems to me to be as pernicious as it is efficacious. To spend life and waste all strength of nerve and heart upon it seems like a duty of sowing the sea-sand. Some good is done, but much less than people think.” Again : How long will sermonizing continue ? With all my heart I hope not to the end of life, unless life is nearly done ; for it is a kind of mean martyrdom by a lingering death.”—*Robertson's Life and Letters.*

I am not called upon to endorse these sentiments in all their breadth. They may have been written on a Monday, while the preacher was suffering under depression arising from reaction ; but it is not the less true that they express Mr. Robertson's calmest and deepest convictions. One cannot, however, but ask, Is it possible that anything like what I have quoted *could* have been written by a good man while basking in the sunshine of popularity, had there not been a persuasion of the most profound character that our ordinary methods of Christian instruction fall far short of the ideal of Christ ?

Before replying at large to this inquiry, let me be permitted to observe that nothing I have said need be supposed to set aside such *special* instruction for children as is now given at stated times by most ministers to them alone. The only point to be looked at is this,—Would a ministry of the Church, if established, *exclude* the children of the flock? I see not why it should.

The Bible never separates parents from their children, or masters from that class of servants who, *unlike our modern domestics*, were then as much under authority as the children. Neither in the Old Testament, nor in the New, is a state of things ever contemplated in which the head of a family should hold one position in relation to God, and his household occupy another. The sons of Noah or of Isaac, of Aaron, of Eli, or of David, however widely differing in character, are all regarded as of the household of faith until their apostasy is avowed, and the transgressors are cut off.

In later times the baptism of the head seems always to have carried with it the baptism of all who were in the house; and where but one parent is Christian, “even *then* are the children holy” (1 Cor. vii. 14). They may grow up to backslide or to apostatize, but they can never occupy a position other than that of “called” ones, who have failed to make their election sure. The apostle says to the jailer not simply, “Believe, and *thou* shalt be saved;” he adds, “*and thy house*” (Acts xvi. 31); and again, in precisely the same spirit, the angel informs Cornelius not only that Peter should tell him words whereby *he* should be saved, but also *all his house* (Acts xi. 14). To interpret these passages as simply meaning that if the household repented and believed they too should be saved, is to deprive them of all point, for this is true of every body.

Christian parents too often regard the bringing of their children to God as a thing apart altogether from *the relation* which they, as the offspring of redeemed persons, have sustained to the Lord from their birth. The baptism of children has unquestionably helped to darken the true position sustained by such, since this rite is generally supposed to *confer* much that has in fact been inherited. As a consequence, it is by some taken for granted that a seed of grace is deposited in baptism, out of which, in later life, true piety developes; while others as unreasonably suppose that the conversion of their children, as a great fact of spiritual experience, is always and necessarily *the beginning* of the Divine life in them, whereas it is not unfrequently the awakening rather than the birth of their spirits.

Violent transformations *ought not* to characterize the history of children born and brought up in families dedicated to Christ. The change experienced by such may be, and indeed *should* be, a conscious one; but it should be the consciousness not so much of a new life, as of a setting out in a new direction. Perhaps it is not too much to say that anomalies like those which now so frequently distress us would rarely exist if Christian families were what they ought to be, and Christian society what God intended it should be.

I am no friend to tyranny or severity of any kind, but I am quite sure that modern parents err greatly in failing to "*command*" their children after them. It is truly pitiful to see young persons, far enough from having attained to years of discretion, set up what they call their religious opinions, in defiance of parental law. One admires ritualism in worship, another floral decorations, a third music or intoned prayers; a fourth is enamoured of

some public orator or other, and so they are permitted to wander where they will, or to imbibe any notions which may at a given time be regarded as fashionable. How such parents can expect a Divine blessing on their endeavours to bring up their children for God I am altogether at a loss to conceive.

What we need in parental rule and in family life, as indeed in everything else, is a *true ideal*. Nor let it be thought that the ideal of the New Testament, however high, is an unpractical one, because it so greatly transcends that of ordinary life. Certain it is that the nearer we can approach to it *in the household*, the greater will be the probability that our children will honour and embrace it.

The young live in ideals. If the ideal be lofty, none will make greater sacrifices for its realization than they. If it be low, none will disregard or despise it so soon. Even as things are (I speak as an old man), young persons commonly surpass their elders, and what is worse, surpass their later selves, in generosity, in disinterestedness, in self-sacrifice, in truthfulness, in all that goes to form *elevation* of character as distinguished from the merely prudential.

What they would be if, instead of seeing, as they do, that half the religion they meet with is a sham, and the other half a strange mixture of things incongruous; that popular Christianity is but an affair of decencies and respectabilities, of ritualisms or of sectarianisms; that its moralities are, for the most part, conventional; its sacrifices nominal; its ambitions earthly; its teaching largely professional; its aims too often carnal; its entire standard of life and conduct not *appreciably* higher than that of the world by which it is surrounded;—what, I say, our children would be if, instead of this, they could see religion treated

as something holy and apart, belonging to another world, and stamped with the character of Divinity, it may not be easy to predict; but of this I am quite sure, that the greater the sacrifice in such a case demanded, the more cheerfully would it be rendered.

The young have no respect for compromises; and they discern with a quick eye the worthlessness of petty restrictions and paltry insincerities. But they respect truth and goodness. They cannot have much regard for a faith which *in theory* mortifies the flesh and crucifies the world, but *in practice* glorifies both, by bowing to the public opinion of the circle in which its possessor may desire to move, and by estimating fellow-creatures not according to their virtue, their integrity, or their nobleness of character, but according to their rank, their wealth, or their culture. They cannot understand, at least so long as their minds are unsophisticated, how it is possible to *live above* the world, and yet to make *success in it* the prime object of existence; to *be dead to it*, and yet to be as keenly alive as others to all the objects of its ambition.

Nor would they, I imagine, *suffer* in any way if all these things were to be reversed; if public preaching were to be superseded in the Church by a closer and more conversational address; if, instead of public appeal to them from the pulpit, private counsel and personal influence were more generally to be exercised; or if, while no barriers were placed in the way of youthful communion, no inducement were offered for the possession of a piety *higher* than that of their ordinary life, or differing from that development of a heavenly character which *ought* to be the invariable result of the instructions and example of a godly family.*

* "Does not the parent among us too often look upon the *meeting-place*

But, finally, it may be said, granting all you desire, what *could* a ministry of the Church, such as has been spoken of, if it existed, *accomplish*, which is not, or at least *might not* be, better done either from the pulpit or by the press?

I think *much*, bearing both on the intellectual enlargement and moral development of the believer: but these topics must form the subjects of separate chapters.

of his Church as more holy than the place of his abode; the *assembly* in that public place as more sacred than the smaller gathering around his own hearth; the *instruction and worship* in the great congregation—the *rites and observances* practised in it—as more solemn and impressive, and more efficacious for spiritual ends, through the fuller measure of the Divine presence and power in them, than any instruction, or service, or action can be expected to be in the little family circle? And thus exalting the Church above the family, as a sphere of Divine influence, he is apt to think that he discharges the chief part of his obligation to the souls of his children, when he brings them under its instruction and influence. Does he not, he will say to himself, render them the highest service in his power,—does he not provide for them the truest moral and religious training,—when he is so careful to take them to the holiest place—the very house of God,—where they witness the most sacred observances, and receive the fullest and most powerful instruction, and are most in the presence of the Divine Spirit? He needs to be warned against this narrow view of his obligation, and of the false estimate, on which it rests, of the moral power of the Church as compared with his own.

“Christian parents need to know, and to be deeply and abidingly sensible, that there are no walls which are hallowed by a Diviner consecration than those within which they dwell; *no functions more sacred* than are assigned to those whom God, by His providence, has ordained to be prophets and priests and kings within their own house; no words spoken by human lips so fitted to be “the power of God unto salvation” as those which should fall from their lips on the ears of their children; no priestly hands so likely, by any acts and observances, to convey the Holy Ghost as their hands by the daily work they may do on the behalf and in the presence of their children; no ministers who can do for the souls in their congregations what they may do for those souls in their families; no Church that has the power for religiously educating like the church in the house.”—*Autumnal Address at Bristol of the Chairman of the Congregational Union.*

CHAPTER X.

INTELLECTUAL ENLARGEMENT.

BY this phrase I mean neither more nor less than what St Paul intends when he says to the Corinthians, "I speak as unto my children, Be ye also *enlarged*" (2 Cor. vi. 13). There is no room to doubt that he refers here to "that expansive effect of love on the heart which is the opposite of narrow-mindedness."

If we connect this exhortation with another, addressed at an earlier period to the same people,—“Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be ye men” (1 Cor. xiv. 20),—we can scarcely fail to see what would have been St. Paul’s thoughts in relation to the duty of taking broad rather than narrow views of truth, and of forming kind rather than harsh judgments regarding fellow-Christians who may seem to us to be in danger of latitudinarianism.

This state of mind—the very opposite of that which has always distinguished those who have attempted to unite open ministry with a rigid adherence to theological formulas—would, I think, be generated by it, were greater freedom of thought and expression allowed; were differences in ministry accepted without violation of Christian love; and were our controversies carried on in more devout submission to the Word of God.

Then, it might be hoped, would good but timid Christians come to see that it is the *unreasoning* man who is of all

others the most unspiritual ; that he who takes the most irrational, and therefore superstitious, view of any ordinance is the one who least appreciates its Divine significance ; that he who most firmly believes the Bible to be from God will most readily appeal to human reason ; that nothing is worse than the tenacious but "*unvivifying* belief which people of evil hearts and lives so often keep upon the great central truths of revelation ; nothing more appalling than their general acceptance of these truths as mathematical certainties, as things laid alongside of their actual life, without their ever touching or quickening their spiritual consciousness." *

But the immediate question to be answered is,—What could a ministry of the Church, if it existed, do for intellectual enlargement which is not, or at least might not be, more effectually accomplished either from the pulpit or by the press ?

In reply, I can only repeat, with reference to the pulpit, my firm conviction that, under the actual conditions of its existence, it is impossible that *more* can be done through that particular agency than is now effected.

The press, or at least that portion of it with which we have here to deal—the religious press—is for the most part *representative*. Commonly established for the purpose of advancing the interests of the party or denomination to which it belongs, it exists—whether weekly or monthly, whether as newspaper or as magazine—in the form of a *property*, sometimes belonging to an individual, but more generally held in trust for some benevolent end. Under such circumstances an editor, however intelligent he may be, is in bonds. He can admit nothing, whether true or

* "The Two Friends," by the author of "The Patience of Hope."

false, which he has reason to believe would alarm subscribers, diminish circulation, and lessen profits.

The inevitable result, however painful it may be to say so, is that truth, which is but another name for Christ (John xiv. 6 ; xviii. 37), everywhere comes into *the market*, and is bought and sold without either buyer or seller realizing the fact that such a traffic is going on. Were the voice of the Redeemer to be heard from heaven, saying, 'Ye sell Me for gain,' the response, without doubt, would be immediate, 'Wherein have we sold Thee?' Habit has in this matter seared conscience, and public opinion, thoroughly perverted, justifies the wrong. *The witness of disinterestedness is lost.*

Yet when, it may well be asked, was truth ever advanced without risk, without loss, without damage? At what period of the world's history has any progress in goodness ever been made which has not involved the injury, and often the ruin, of objects which, until their overthrow, filled their supporters with complacency.

It is this state of things,—the subsidizing of an order of men to teach a given theology, and the further subsidizing of a religious press to support these teachings, which stereotypes religious thought, paralyzes the devout lay mind, and exposes so much that is justly dear to us to perpetual assault from the standpoints of scepticism.

Separate apostolic truth from post-apostolic developments, and the contest with error is already more than half over. Continue to identify the two, and it will inevitably go on with ever increasing fierceness, and too often with disastrous results. To contend with scepticism in this fashion is to fight with tied hands, and to render the use of the pebble and the sling impossible.

But it may be said, What evidence is there that, gene-

rally speaking, the mind of the laity, active enough in all secular concerns, *is* paralyzed in relation to Divine truth?

I think there is much reason to believe that this is the case. Perhaps, however, I ought to have said *drugged* rather than paralyzed, for it is a state of mind *induced by opiates*. Be this, however, as it may, it must, I fear, be taken for true, that the present condition of educated persons generally, who have given themselves to Christ, is, *in some aspects*, absolutely deplorable.

I say advisedly "in some aspects," because in active efforts to do good, whether as teachers of the young, visitors of the poor, distributors of tracts, or supporters of missions, many young people especially are exemplary. It is truly refreshing to see how cheerfully multitudes, moved by the purest motives, sacrifice time and sometimes health, in the various labours to which they consider themselves called by God and by His Church. But it is no less painful to observe how singularly the mass of these labourers fall short in all that may be termed *growth in the truth*.

Beyond that kind of acquaintance with Scripture which is needful for the instruction of children in a Sunday school, and which is commonly acquired in Bible classes; beyond what may be gathered from sermons or from magazines, or be selected from the Sacred Volume for the promotion of devotional feeling,—not a few otherwise intelligent Christians know next to nothing of what God has revealed. That *the active use of the intellect* is essential to the acquisition of Divine truth, these excellent persons seem never to suspect, or, if such a thought does occasionally occur, they think themselves bound to crush it as something contrary to faith and humility. As a consequence, the most astounding ignorance is commonly manifested in relation to almost everything in the Bible, beyond

that narrow circle in which, as it is fondly imagined, all fundamental and essential truth is included.

That scores of texts are, both from the pulpit and in religious books, especially of the more Evangelical class, and to a still greater extent in religious tracts, constantly perverted from their true meaning, they are absolutely unconscious. Of Old Testament prophecy, especially in relation to the future, they know next to nothing. To what may be said either for or against the expectation of a pre-millennial advent of the Lord, they are total strangers. Into the true meaning of the general text of Scripture, so far as it may be obtained from the study of the writings of devout critics, or by an independent consideration of the context, they never think of entering. Each section of the Church has so long appointed and supported trained men to justify its own views Sunday by Sunday from the pulpit, that this is regarded as enough. All that is not handled *there*,—and oh, how much does this embrace!—is left untouched.

Almost every subject on which Christians are *divided in opinion*, and especially those which have long formed topics for controversy, might with advantage be examined afresh, if only it were done without regard to ecclesiastical prejudices or interests. The probability is, that in almost all cases, the combatants on both sides are more or less in the wrong,—partly because of the antagonistic position in relation to others which each has thought it needful to occupy, and partly because all alike have, in various forms, identified the possession or preservation of property with adherence to given forms of thought or practice.

On all these subjects there is still room for an honest inquirer to ask, "What saith the Scripture?" Instead, therefore, of avoiding what are called disputed points, these, *because of the diversities of view to which they have given*

birth, are the very subjects which demand the earliest attention of every man who believes that such diversity can arise only from misconception or prejudice. Almost every theological tenet, however devout or respected may be its adherents, needs in this way to be calmly reconsidered *in the interests of truth alone*, and without regard to sect or party.

Finally, *every subject* which is more or less dimly or clearly revealed in Scripture, but *rarely if ever handled in the pulpit*, ought in turn to be examined by the Church. The following in particular might be named :—The condition of the ancient world outside of Judaism ; the marked absence of anything approaching to a missionary spirit in the chosen people ; Old Testament prophecy generally ; the ministry of angels under the old dispensation and under the new ; the Scriptural sense of such words as wrath, salvation, conversion, and regeneration ; the testimony of the Bible in relation to Hades or the invisible world, to heaven as the abode of God and of the holy angels, and to hell or Gehenna as distinguished from future retribution generally ; the Fatherhood of God, as implying everything involved in moral government ; the resurrection of the body ; the first resurrection, and the general resurrection ; a particular providence as harmonizing with fixed law ; the administration of the Lord's Supper, whether regarded in Scripture as a Church or as a household ordinance ; the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and on the world ; the character of the particular dispensation under which we are living ; the character of the period called the millennium ; the hope of Israel as spoken of by St. Paul ; the nations of the saved outside the New Jerusalem ; the probability or otherwise of pardon or probation for the heathen, either in Hades or after the resur-

rection; the Church, its origin, nature, object, and end; the Christian ministry, its character and claim; the priesthood of all believers; the New Testament prophet; the kingdom of God, and of heaven; the mystery of iniquity; the last form of Antichrist; the calamities of the latter day; and the final reign of the saints.

On all these subjects, rarely if ever treated on in the public assembly, Scripture reveals *something*. The character and *extent* of the revelation is in each case the sole point to be ascertained. No man can examine these questions and many similar ones freely and carefully, without feeling that the Bible is the most *interesting* book in the world, and that an extended investigation into its contents and teaching, far from diverting the mind from practical duty, tends more than anything else to deepen a sense of responsibility, and to elevate the entire character.

Nor is this all. There are not a few subjects, and important ones too, which, belonging exclusively to believers, cannot be dealt with, either before a mixed congregation, or by the press, without injury. The doctrine of election, *in some of its aspects*, is of this character, and so is that of a future restitution, involving, as it does, the pardon of sin after death, and a twofold salvation,—the higher and the lower. Truths of this character, so far as they are revealed, are *for the believer only*. To a sinner, called to immediate repentance and faith,—his present and pressing duty,—it would obviously be most unsuitable to speak *even of the possibility* of salvation in other states of existence; *to him* the only message is, “He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned;” since whatever mercy may be in store elsewhere for the neglecter of truth here, it is *uncovenanted* mercy, and not part of the offer now made to such persons.

Further, whatever may ultimately be the *different conditions* of the saved in other worlds,—and it will assuredly be something very different from the unmeaning talk we so often hear about *degrees of happiness* in heaven,—it must not be forgotten that God never *calls* any man to less than sonship and a “crown,” and that whatever may follow after death, either to the ignorant or inconsistent, *forms no part of the public testimony of the Gospel.*

Yet these things are not to be passed by. *All that is revealed* relating thereto is to be carefully gathered up and garnered as a precious portion of the believer's hope. *To him* it is of vast importance to know that “there are many gains and many losses *in Christ* ;” that there are persons who may be saved, and yet go away sorrowing, simply because “we are made poor by what we miss as well as by what we lose.” *To him*, too, is it given to know, without abusing the knowledge, that the redemption of *the world* by Christ is as certain as the salvation of the elect, and that the revelation of this truth is made *to comfort* him in present darkness, to *enlarge* his conceptions of the love that passeth knowledge, to give him rest in *the equity* of a mercy that endureth for ever, and to make the Divine sovereignty the source, not of selfish but of a world-wide and loving satisfaction.

But how can truths, capable of being appreciated *only by those to whom Christ has addressed them*, be impressed as they ought to be, so long as no ministry for the Church exists which is capable of being separated from that which is for the world ?

Surely it is for a lamentation that, beyond what is involved in active duty, Christianity, as it is now received, has no *special* message for the believer, and makes little or no claim on the spiritual understanding of the man who

accepts it. Years roll on, and sermons are multiplied, but the mind of the Christian community does not advance. Nay, it is by no means uncommon to find both men and women, after ten, twenty, or thirty years' profession of religion, *more ignorant of the Bible as a whole* than they were when they first called themselves Christians. It is this that makes the sceptical tendencies of the age—I might say error of every kind—so dangerous. A man intelligently and spiritually acquainted with Scripture is in as little danger from infidelity as from Romanism. Without this defence he is in constant peril from both.

I have said, and I am sure with truth, that the present age is *an age of feeble convictions*. But a disciple of Christ should be known quite as much *by the strength of his belief* as by the harmony of his conduct with the teachings of the Book by which he professes to be guided.

I do not mean to affirm that such a man *must* necessarily hold this or that theory of inspiration; or that he must deny the existence of a human element in the Bible, *without which* it would not have been fit for its purpose, but with which is inevitably associated a certain amount of liability to error,* *in cases where verbal accuracy is not all important*, and where, therefore, it has not been secured by

* Two facts are indisputable: one is that errors exist in the Bible as we have it (*e. g.*, comp. 2 Chron. xxii. 2 with 2 Kings viii. 26); the other is that no errors can be found important enough to affect the great purposes of the Book itself. Corruptions in the text, mistranslations, and interpolations, may indeed be found, for "the Book" has not been preserved from accidents which belong to the transmission of all ancient documents; but the great security is, that "all Scriptural truths reverberate and diffuse themselves along the pages of the Bible; none is confined to one text, or one mode of enunciation; all parts of the scheme are eternally chasing each other; they diverge only to recombine, and under such a vast variety of expressions that it is utterly impossible for truth to be neutralized by any mistakes of the kind supposed."

verbal inspiration. But I do maintain that his convictions must be of a kind and character *very far above* all such considerations ; that they must be unfaltering and unassailable,—deep as the consciousness he has of his own responsibility to God, and indelible as the very instincts of his nature.

Evidences set forth in books,—however valuable and important in their place,—can never supply what is needed. The belief on which a man is to live must rest on experience ; on an experience not less real than that which guides him in daily life ; which gives him an unshaken confidence in the regularity of the laws of nature, and which leads him, day by day, to stake all that is dear to him on the stability of the material world. The first preachers of the Gospel triumphed in consequence of their unshaken confidence in the certainty of that GREAT BODY OF FACTS on which they rested all they taught. They *knew* in whom they had believed, and by the force of that knowledge they conquered in an age which was even more sceptical than our own. This alone is, properly speaking, FAITH.

But how is it possible for convictions like these to prevail among men who hold, as Christians now commonly do, that a great part of Divine truth is *incomprehensible* ; that very much that is included in what we call Divine revelation is no *revelation* at all, since it cannot be *understood* ; that although not understood it is nevertheless in some way or other to be believed ; that the *meaning* of large portions of the Word of God—its interpretation—is only to be arrived at by most uncertain processes ; that in relation to a variety of points in Scripture wide divergencies of opinion will always prevail, inasmuch as such differences arise, not from sin, but from temperament,—from differing idio-

syncretisms,—from the ever shifting media through which men necessarily read the Word.

How is it possible that any man should have strong confidence in the teachings of Scripture who holds that God allows obscurity and difficulty, *not* as a part of our probation, testing thereby our simplicity of purpose, our candour, or our freedom from pride and prejudice, *which would be a truth*; but in order that we might learn to bear with each other's blunders, and that the diversity of sects thence arising might, through the agency of party, call forth greater energy, and, by antagonism, lead to a higher purity than could be expected if the stimulus of opposition were withdrawn?

The fallacy and folly of all this is obvious. To maintain that God's Word is incomprehensible and indefinite,—that His "trumpet" gives "an uncertain sound,"—is as absurd as to say that light does not enlighten. The Book itself tells us that God's *deepest truth* is plain to babes, and dark only to the wise and learned. We reverse the teaching, and say,—Divine truth is dark to all but the learned, and clear probably to none.

And *why* do we fall into this error? Simply because we set out with a persuasion that a book about the meaning of which men have quarrelled so long, was never meant to be more than partially understood; because we build our beliefs in relation to it, *not* on that inward and Divine revelation which God makes of Himself and of His truth in the heart of every renewed man, but *on external testimony*,—on testimony the value of which must depend entirely on researches open only to the few, and which are, after all, to some extent necessarily fluctuating and uncertain; because we fill our minds with speculations of all kinds about *the philosophy* of revelation, instead of simply accepting the facts of it; and because, owing to our indolence and world-

liness, *we prefer* an uncertain belief which costs us no trouble, to the *certain faith* which, however enlightening, might poison some cups of mere worldly pleasure.

The faith of God's elect is a faith that receives the Bible mainly *on the evidence it gives of itself*, and on the certainty of the greatest of all the facts of our experience, that in the hands of the Spirit of God *it regenerates*; that it delivers us from the bondage of law and sin, and that it brings us into the liberty of love and grace.

And this may be done without at all undervaluing what is usually termed the evidences of Christianity,—without at all despising that historic testimony to a miraculous economy on which our belief in the supernatural rests; for Christianity undoubtedly bases itself on facts recorded in sacred books, which have been transmitted to us by means in no way materially differing from those which have conserved other ancient documents. But this kind of evidence, however important in its season, is but rudimentary. As we advance in the Christian life we may be said to *grow out of it*, for that which is much more convincing then takes its place.

No belief that is not experimental and renewing can ever unite men in one judgment, since only as a man is delivered from the prejudices and sins which becloud his faculties, can he obtain a clear and true view of the teaching of Holy Scripture. Perhaps it is not too much to say that while *we begin* the Christian life by deriving our knowledge of God *from* Scripture, we end by becoming ourselves witnesses *to* Scripture, inasmuch as we ultimately obtain through the Holy Spirit an acquaintance with our Heavenly Father far *beyond* any that the Bible alone can impart, and a faith in His character which would be unshaken were the Book itself to disappear for ever.

To a genuine disciple, really enlightened by the truth itself, all the external testimony in the world, miraculous or otherwise, could not give additional confidence. Such a faith may indeed be shaken ; for *doubt* sometimes comes as a consequence of sin, sometimes as a result of sickness, and sometimes as a direct temptation of Satan ; but it will be only temporary ; the heart will set right that which has gone wrong, and *trust* will supply the place of present consciousness.

But more, such a believer will not only accept the Gospel, he will both live and *teach* it, even at a cost few in this generation seem disposed to pay,—the cost of time now devoted to business. No man can, properly speaking, be a disciple of Christ who does not learn *in order that he may teach* ;—not perhaps publicly, for few are called to this duty, but at least individually and socially,—in the family, in limited circles, in private conversation, and this on the ground that, being a Christian, he is *an appointed conservator of truth*.

For *his own* benefit he will do this, inasmuch as the strength of his faith in the Book will depend more than anything else on his holy and intelligent familiarity with its contents,—a familiarity scarcely ever obtained by those who do not, in one form or other, feel bound to teach ; and further, because the task he is called upon to undertake will eminently tend to counteract the temptations of daily life, to check the desire of gain, and to enlarge every faculty of his mind.

For the benefit of *others* he will do it, because he is *a representative man* ; it may be the head of a household, for whose instruction he is responsible ; because he is to be a pattern to the world in which he lives and works, of what a Christian should be ; because he is a guardian of that

faith which has never been corrupted except by professional theologians, when unchecked by an intelligent laity.

For the individual and collective *instruction* of the "body of Christ," then, if for no other reason, an open ministry, demanding for God's service, intelligence from the intelligent, research from the more highly educated, and active participation in teaching *from all who are capable of it*, has become a necessity.

The bearing which a well-regulated open ministry might *in time* be expected to have in bringing about a common understanding as to what the Bible either proclaims or whispers, must not here be unnoticed.

Few things probably are more painfully perplexing to a Christian heart than the fact that men apparently equal in ability, in piety, and in integrity, while alike recognizing the necessity of Divine guidance and seeking it earnestly, yet come to directly opposite conclusions as to the actual teachings of Scripture on points which, far from being unimportant, greatly affect both conduct and character. The office and authority of the Church, the character and meaning of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, all in short that falls under the head of what are commonly known as "Church principles," are of this class. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion, that in the different views taken as to the teaching of Scripture on these points, some of us must be fearfully wrong. It cannot be a matter of indifference whether a man accepts or rejects priestly intervention in religious services; whether he regards Baptism as a regenerating ordinance, a declaratory one, or a merely symbolic assertion of spiritual need; whether in short he admits or denies the Scriptural character of that great system of Ecclesiasticism which, more or less, although

modified in form and extent, claims rule alike over the Papist and the Protestant.

How is a Christian inquirer to ascertain what is his duty in this matter? How is he to arrive at firm and settled convictions as to what Scripture authorizes or forbids him to do?

I reply, let him remember two things: one is, that the revelation of God is the probation of man; that Scripture, like everything else, is *to us* what we are *to it*; that our *reading* depends on the point of view from which we regard it; that while a latitudinarian will see what he will call "broad" principles in every page, it will as certainly seem to an ecclesiastic redolent on all sides of Church authority. The other is, that while to an unbelieving mind the Book will present innumerable difficulties, and to a credulous one offer abundant food for credulity, it consents to open its richest treasures only to the man whose eye (to use a painter's phrase) is "innocent;" whose heart is pure, and whose faith, instead of being mere indolent assent, is but the expression of his highest reason.

But it will be said, admitting all this, how is an ordinary reader helped by the concession? I reply—directly not at all; but indirectly much, since it is of no slight importance that such an one should know assuredly that, after the text of Scripture has been ascertained ever so exactly, and the translation of it made ever so accurate, there still remains an obstacle to be overcome, alike by learned and unlearned, which, if not mastered, will as effectually darken the meaning of the Word as any corruption, either of text or version. However thankfully, therefore, he may accept the labours of competent men on preliminary points, the simplest reader still finds himself face to face with a difficulty with which learning cannot deal, and the removal of which is his own special obligation.

The obstacle in question is *a biassed will*, a leaning in favour of some foregone conclusion, the absence of DISINTERESTEDNESS. Whether this arises from prejudice taking the form of piety,—from laudable desire to uphold a given system or form of doctrine, esteemed all-important,—from timidity, and fear of reproach,—from the ambition of influencing others for God,—or from unwillingness to give up either long-cherished traditional views, or opinions formed independently, and avowed perhaps at some cost, matters little; the evil is the same.

These prepossessions—one or other of them—commonly form the ground, *the elevated spot*, from which we look over the field of revelation; and whatever be the peculiar eminence from which we gaze, *that* decides the character of the scene *to us*. According to a man's standpoint, therefore, is the impression he receives as to what the teaching of Scripture really is. Given the precise point of view from which any one looks, and we know what he will see, as surely as we can foretell the particular features of natural scenery which will strike one who occupies a certain position for its review.

It cannot be otherwise; nor has God intended that it should be. But what follows? Plainly this:—That our understanding of Scripture aright (the text and the translation being accurate) depends not only on a right state of mind—which all Christians admit, and to obtain which they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit,—but also, and equally, on freedom from the entanglements of interests, the renunciation of which are in our own power, did we but see how they darken.

The man that has freed himself from these secondary and disturbing influences is, so far, a *disinterested* inquirer. He may be ignorant in relation to many things, he may be

a very sinful man, he may be actually vicious, and yet, in spite of all, he will, if a diligent reader of Scripture, be far more likely to attain to a *knowledge* of the truth—whether he obeys it or not—than the man who, however devout, however evangelically enlightened, or however personally pure, is nevertheless so mixed up with things which are dear to him as a means of usefulness, or with persons honoured for their zeal, that he cannot but approach the word of God with a strong and earnest desire—how strong he himself has little conception—to find *there* support for them; with an indisposition—how deep he little imagines—to *see* anything in Scripture which seems to throw doubt either on their excellence or Divine authority. But the fact is, that only as we search for truth, *without reference to any end beyond itself*—whether that end be our own peace of mind or the conversion of others, the sustentation of any institution, the support of any doctrine, or the establishment of any view to which we ourselves may stand committed,—can we hope to discover what God has really revealed.

But if this be so, “organized Christianity” stands condemned by its own necessities. For it cannot exist without creating bias, without demanding that certain *inferences* shall stand side by side with directly revealed truths, without *committing* men, in countless methods, to preconceived conclusions, under the power of which the Bible is scarcely ever read in a disinterested spirit.

Just in proportion as these accretions can be shaken off; just in proportion as Christian men can be brought to the study of Scripture without care for anything beyond the acquisition of truth; just in so far, other things being equal, will they *read alike*, will they see eye to eye, will they view all things in their true proportions, and bow in common

before an authority which will then be alike intelligible and indisputable.

That THE VISIBLE UNITY OF THE CHURCH would eventually be promoted by a provision for the regular and quiet discussion of all that bears upon the believer's hope *by* all who are competent to form and to utter the judgments of a wise and understanding heart, cannot, I think, be doubted. As things now stand, *the witness of catholicity is lost.*

I know very well that those who are attached to denominationalism think very little of this loss. Romanism alone attaches prime importance to visible unity as a witness,—“It keeps and transmits a secret which it has not itself apparently understood.” “The Church” must be ONE, if it is indeed “the fulness of Him who filleth all in all;” for if we are complete in Him, He also is completed in us. His words are not only “You in Me,” but also “I in you;” the Head of the great body says not to any one of His members, “I have no need of thee.”

Denominationalism, perhaps one might say Protestantism, does not understand this. It does not understand that *one part of the Church can never rise much above the level of the whole*; that one section is ever acting and reacting on another; that, to a great extent, the moral elevation or depression of the Church is dependent on the general moral condition of all who call themselves Christians. “The want of generous and exalted aims, the absence of lofty and kindly traditions, affect a whole community. It is hard to be always in opposition; even the nobler mind will, in some degree, succumb to what it continually meets, becoming, like the dyer's hand, ‘subdued to what it works in.’ Ice cannot change to water, or water to steam, until the temperature of *the whole* has been raised to a certain level. Any heat short of the amount required to produce these

changes becomes latent, and disappears; it is absorbed in producing these changes. Who can say how much Christian energy and love disappears, sinks below the surface, in this way, depressed by the low level of the surrounding atmosphere?"

"As the world is, the few earnest Christians scattered here and there in it—one in a family, a few in a city—are enough to keep the mass from freezing; but their life, we may say, is spent in keeping up their life:"—

"A flower that, bold and patient, thrusts its way
Through stony chinks, lives on from day to day,
But little shows of fragrance or of bloom." *

That open ministry of some kind is as much needed for *the moral development* of the Church as it is for its intellectual advancement I shall attempt to show more at large in following pages.

* "The Two Friends," by the author of "The Patience of Hope."

CHAPTER XI.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT.

ONE of the most pressing wants of the Church at the present day is a *truer and more perfect ideal* of the Divine life than that which prevails amongst us. The want has been *created* by the ever-increasing approximation of the world to the Church in *the outward*, without its being really brought into subjection to the inward and living principles of the Gospel. It can be *supplied* only by the gradual elevation of the entire body to the Divine standard.

Supposing, then, the question to be put, 'What is the true ideal to which the Church should be continually endeavouring to raise its members?' 'What is the instruction it should give to those who desire to enter by the "strait gate," and to walk in the "narrow way"?' our first business is to be agreed as to the answer.

I am anxious to avoid anything like dogmatism on this subject, but I may be permitted to say that it has long been a growing, and is now a settled conviction with me, that the Church has not looked at this subject as it ought to have done; that there is *within the Christian body* no fixed opinion as to what is right or wrong in relation to many of the most practical questions that come before a man in life; that there is no platform on which such subjects can be quietly and seriously examined; that the pulpit is not a fit place for discussions of this character;

that no one man is qualified to decide such matters for a congregation ; that, whether rightly or not, there is a strong indisposition to attach much importance to the opinions of men who are supposed to have but a limited acquaintance with the actual difficulties of secular life ; that the religious press, even if it were open to such questions, would be an altogether unsuitable channel for their investigation, since it addresses itself for the most part to persons who, on various accounts, are ill-fitted to form any judgment on such topics ; and that, as a consequence of this state of things, young men rise into life unwarned and uninstructed regarding matters which are very soon found to have a most intimate bearing on the character of their religion.

To prevent misapprehension, let me enumerate some of the points on which, as I believe, most of us are at sea, *or*—for that will perhaps better bring out my meaning—let me simply ask for an answer to the question, ‘What is the believer’s true relation to the world in which his lot is cast?’

On this point, *some*, as is well known, have taken ground which by Christians generally is deemed unsound and extravagant. They have advocated nothing short of asceticism *in certain directions* ; they have denied it to be the duty of a Christian man to fill, if called upon to do so, the office of the magistrate ; they have refused to take any part in returning members to Parliament ; they have abjured all interest in literature or in art ; they have declined to share in any effort that may be made to *improve* society, excepting by the inculcation of the Gospel ; they have, in short, acted on their avowed conviction that the world, as it is, is given to Satan, and that Christians, being members of a better kingdom, and heirs to a higher inheritance, should abandon its concerns to the ungodly. Rousseau interpreted

the New Testament in this way, and then objected to Christianity that, by teaching a man to regard himself as a citizen of another world, it diverted him from the performance of his duties as a member of civil society. He says a society of true Christians would no longer be a society of *men*.

Christianity as exhibited by the Egyptian anchorites of the early Church, or by the asceticism of later monks, might be liable to this charge, but it cannot be sustained for a moment against apostolic Christianity. *This*, as it came from Christ, never required a heathen civilization "to assist in securing a well-balanced development of the powers of the Christian system." In supposing that it did, Mr. Gladstone, like Rousseau, confounds primitive Christianity with its *corrupted* manifestations.

There are those, however, who occupy a directly opposite position, and deny that a Christian, as such, is called upon to refrain from desiring *any* of the ordinary objects of human ambition so long as they are not in themselves sinful. Such persons maintain that Christ has sanctified the world and all its concerns; that religion is intended not to sever us from any object of earthly interest, but to adorn ordinary life; that we must not, therefore, call anything common or unclean; that our duty is to occupy as prominent a place as we can in the world's affairs, and to show how *every* station, however exalted, may serve to illustrate true piety, and to exhibit the beauty of holiness.

Underneath these divergences of opinion unquestionably lie *conflicting principles*, and principles so influential and important, that as one or the other may be adopted will be the prevailing character of a man's life. Where, under such circumstances, shall a young man go for guidance? 'To Scripture,' will of course be the reply. Let us then look

for a few moments at the testimony of Holy Writ, in order to ascertain what is indeed the true position of a renewed man in relation to the world.

It will not be necessary to examine every passage which may be supposed more or less to relate thereto. *Some* of these are merely negative; *others* are more positive in character: some obviously apply only to Christians living under heathen rule, while others are of universal application. All, indeed, convey lessons to which it is well that we should take heed, but for our present purpose it is only necessary to gather up such as Christians generally admit to be intended for the guidance of the believer in all ages.

We note then, first of all, that the world is neither to be hated nor despised by the Christian. It is Christ's world. He created it (John i. 10); He loves it (iii. 16); He is its Saviour (John iv. 42); He takes away its sin (John i. 29); He is its "life" and its "light" (John vi. 51; viii. 12). Christians, in like manner, are to be the "lights" and the "salt" of the earth,—they are to illuminate it and to preserve it from putrefaction (Matt. v. 13, 14).

But the world knows not its true friends (John i. 10). Through ignorance it hates those whom it ought to love (John xv. 18). It is, indeed, a conquered world, and its subjection will one day be made manifest (John xvi. 33; Col. i. 19, 20); but until then, Christians, although in it (John xvii. 15), are not to be of it (John xv. 19; xvii. 16). *They* stand in a distinct and peculiar relation to the Redeemer (John xiv. 19); they are crucified to the world (Gal. vi. 14); they are to keep themselves unspotted from it (Jas. i. 27); they are not to love it or its objects of ambition (1 John ii. 15); they are to regard its friendship as enmity with God (Jas. iv. 4); they are, in short, to over-

come it (1 John v. 4), being neither choked by its cares, crushed by its anxieties, nor bewildered by its seductions.

It may, however, be said that the world here intended is not one in which Christian civilization predominates; that the world *meant* is that which then was,—a heathen world, which could scarcely be touched without pollution. But this limitation of the word cannot be sustained. John expressly declares, as if to separate the question from all the accidents of civilization, "Whatsoever is not of the Father is of the world. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and *the pride of life*, is not of the Father, but of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." No language more sweeping or comprehensive than that which he employs can be found.

St. Paul, in almost every epistle, inculcates similar doctrine; Christ, he says, is now at the right hand of God in heavenly places, or "the heavenlies" (Ephes. i. 20); Christians are there too, "quickened," "saved," "raised," even now sitting with Christ in these same "heavenly places," or "heavenlies" (Ephes. ii. 5, 6); as such, they are "dead" to the world (Col. iii. 3), "alive" unto Christ (Rom. vi. 11); by Him they are already "saved" (1 Cor. i. 18), and *with* Him already "risen" (Col. iii. 1); they are fellow-citizens with the saints, and their conversation is in heaven (Phil. iii. 20); they are of the household of God (Ephes. ii. 19). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews addresses them as persons who have *actually come* "into the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and are the companions of the angels" (Heb. xii. 22); while St. Peter, in the same spirit, beseeches those to whom he writes, "as pilgrims and strangers," to abstain from evil

(1 Pet. ii. 11) ; remembering that they are *kept* by the power of God for a salvation one day to be fully revealed.

That much of this language is figurative cannot be questioned, but it is not therefore the less real. It means, if it means anything, that in heart, in affection, in all that constitutes the inner man, Christians are not of this world ; that they *dwell* elsewhere ; that they are but sojourners in a world which is soon to pass away.

The idea conveyed seems to be this, that believers ought to regard themselves as having, in a figure, both ascended and descended : *ascended* with their Lord into the heavens ; *descended* as His representatives to benefit and bless the earth by their self-denial, their holy example, their life, and self-sacrifice ;—*materially*, in the body, *spiritually*, in heaven, waiting for the redemption of the body, to be entirely and perfectly with Him whom they love and for whom they live.

“Heaven opened to the soul while yet on earth ;

Earth forced on the soul's use while yet in heaven.”

This seems to be the *root-thought* of the Apostle, and it implies that the renewed man is one who, instead of being content with gazing up to heaven as to a land afar off, which he hopes one day to reach, ought habitually to look on earth *from heaven*, and to regard his temporary residence in the world as at once disciplinary and vicarious, intended to perfect his own character and to benefit others.

We come into the world, not *to enjoy* a life which is to be chastened by suffering ; but *to suffer* in a world of sin, amid many enjoyments vouchsafed for its alleviation. It *must* be so, on account of the great moral ends of existence, and they are happy who early learn to recognize the fact, and thankfully to acquiesce in all that it involves. To *such* sorrow can never be overwhelming.

Such an ideal is certainly a very lofty one, and hard to be reached ; but never let us forget that it is far better to hold to a true and high ideal, however much we may come short of it, than to be content with a false and low one, *however much we may live above it.*

To this lofty calling, the morality of the Gospel, as laid down by our Lord in the sermon on the mount, singularly corresponds. His disciples are to be poor in spirit, meek, and as eager for the right (righteousness) as a hungry man is for bread, or a thirsty one for water. They must be merciful, pure in heart (sound-hearted), and peacemakers, accounting themselves *blessed* when persecuted, reviled, and falsely accused for righteousness' sake.

They are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, winning glory to God by their holy life before man. They are neither to lower nor to tamper with one tittle of the Divine law, but to regard it as extending to the thoughts and intents of the heart. If unforgiving, they are not to venture to offer sacrifice. They are neither to swear, nor to take revenge, nor to retaliate. They are to submit patiently to wrong, to love their enemies, to do good in secret, and to pray with the door shut. They are to lay up no treasure on earth which could win their hearts. They are to live by faith, and to have no anxieties or carking cares.

They are to be kind and candid in all their judgments of others,—severe only on themselves. They are not to coarsen or cheapen their high calling by giving that which is holy unto dogs ; nor are they to enkindle the anger of the brutish by casting before them pearls, the worth of which such men cannot comprehend. They are in all things to depend on God, and they are invariably to do unto others as they would that men should do unto them.

By this "strait gate" and "narrow way" alone, says the Lord, is "life" to be found; and anxiously are they bidden to beware of false prophets teaching otherwise, lest they should eventually be found to have built their expectations for the future, not on the rock, but on mere sand, which would in the day of trial slip from under them.

Nowhere are these "counsels of perfection," as they have recently been called, lowered. Nowhere is it implied that in after ages they would be somewhat modified, so as to adapt them to any given state of society. Yet nowhere are they supposed to be *practicable* in the world *as it is*, except in the case of individuals who are prepared to sacrifice self-interest, reputation, nay, life itself, in order to follow the Master.

Some other injunctions were evidently *not* intended for all, but only for those to whom they were addressed. We have an instance of this kind in our Lord's reply to the young man who came to him saying, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Jesus said, "If thou wilt be perfect, [*i. e.*, be ready to follow Me to crucifixion, as these are doing,] go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me. And the young man went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions."

We have here an instance of the distinction drawn between disciples and mere followers. *All men* are not called to abandon their possessions in order to prove their faith in Christ; but he who wished to follow the Lord when He was on earth had to do it "through great tribulation," and was therefore obliged practically to abandon his property. Such periods have from time to time recurred in the history of the Church, and probably will do so again. Through unwillingness to pay the price needful to attain

discipleship the young ruler lost the "*great reward*," but there is not a syllable to show that he was abandoned to Satan for ever.

The sermon on the mount and the exhortations of the Apostles explain each other. The Lord lays down rules of life for the Christian, obedience to which is never supposed to be practicable in the world as it is, *except in the case of individuals* who are prepared, when called upon to do so, to sacrifice self-interest, reputation, nay, life itself, in the service. The Apostles accept the obligation in all its fulness, and therefore, as we have seen, speak of the Christian as a man dead to the world, who has already risen, and who is even now a fellow-citizen with the saints above.

And now the question returns, "What does all this involve?" Is the Christian to have nothing to do with the world? Is he to abandon its government to the wicked? Is he, because he has a citizenship above, to deny the obligation to fulfil the ordinary duties of a citizen on earth? If so, why is he on earth at all? How can he either enlighten or purify it unless he dwells in it, and more or less mingles, as his Lord did, with all classes? And yet, if he does thus take part in its concerns, how can he be dead to it?

Simply, as I imagine, by separating that to which he is *called as a duty*, from that which he *chooses as a satisfaction*. The first always implies more or less of self-denial; the last is but the gratification of a desire.

Illustrations will readily present themselves. Whatever distaste a Christian man may have for a trade or a profession, *duty* commonly requires not only that he should engage in one for the sustenance of those who depend upon him, but that he should be "diligent" in his occupation, and become *in it* an example of integrity, of faith, and of purity.

His *inclination*, on the other hand, may be to give up *his whole soul* to this calling; his *ambition* to become rich by its means; but no apology can be framed for yielding to this temptation, since he is under no Christian obligation to place either himself or his family in any given position in life, while *he is* under the highest obligation to stand loose to the things of time, and to live, to study, and to teach on the behalf of Christ and the Church.

A Christian man may indeed find himself, without any desire of his own, *called* to office, to the possession of wealth, or to the exercise of political or other influence. The responsibility involved thereby may be painful to him, but he is not, therefore, to evade the obligation. He is, on the contrary, to fulfil it as one *who is discharging a trust* conscientiously, laboriously, and faithfully. But the very same sense of right which obliges him to accept and to fulfil *as duty* any trust which may devolve upon him, *forbids* him to seek either rank, or wealth, or power. And for obvious reasons. He *cannot* be injured by the performance of any obligation, which he discharges only because he honestly believes it is imposed upon him by God. He *cannot but* be injured by the indulgence of any ambition which requires, as conditions of success, too great a dedication of time and thought; solicitations for the favour of men; the sanctioning of anything that may be *in a Christian* either wrong or doubtful; or conformity to customs, habits, or standards of conduct, because they are prevalent in a world which, however varnished by a Christian civilization, is itself at heart alienated from God.

Is it too much to say that an honest recognition of these distinctions would revolutionize the opinions of Christian society; would interfere greatly with many a man's worldly interests; would often lead him to be regarded as eccentric,

and therefore occasion his being passed by in favour of more moderate and reasonable persons? Such a man, no longer feeling himself bound to run the race of worldly success neck to neck with men of another mind, would, in all probability, fail to enrich his family; for his time and thoughts would be only *partially* given to business, a portion of each day being always redeemed for higher ends. And yet it seems difficult to suppose that anything short of this can be implied in being a pilgrim and stranger in the world, or with having a life hid with Christ in God.

I am quite aware that many excellent Christians will think that I have gone too far. I am by no means prepared to insist that I have put this matter of the believer's relation to the world precisely as it should be put. I may have overlooked considerations of a contrary character which are fitted greatly to modify what I have advanced. All that I say is, that these, and many other kindred questions, ought to be examined and discussed—not through the public press, for reasons that I have already stated; *not* from the pulpit to mixed audiences, for whom they are unadapted; but *in the Church*, and by men who, themselves mingling in the world, have been, or are likely soon to be, in circumstances which must render clear and fixed views on such subjects of the highest practical importance to them.

I have said elsewhere that the Christian is a man who is placed by God under certain obligations, which, although imperative on him as an individual, are not applicable to society at large, to a nation, or to a Government. Let me illustrate this statement.

The law of Christ certainly seems to be clear in relation to non-resistance. The Christian is not *to strive*. He is to return good for evil. He is to overcome evil with good.

But this law is not intended for mixed communities, or for nations; nor could any State be governed for a single year on this principle. War, with all its miseries, is *to nations*, (men being what they are,) frequently productive of more good than evil. "By mere force of order and authority, the army is the salvation of myriads; and men who, under other circumstances, would have sunk into lethargy or dissipation, are redeemed into noble life by a service which at once summons and directs their energies. No nation ever yet enjoyed a protracted and triumphant peace without receiving in its own bosom ineradicable seeds of future decline." The fact is, "both peace and war are noble or ignoble according to their kind and occasion;" and in like manner, the duty of non-resistance to many forms of wrong turns entirely upon the *motive* which occasions it, and consequently upon the character of the man who abstains.

Let no one be stumbled at this attempt to show that the same law may be binding upon an individual believer, and yet not at all binding on the mixed body that constitutes a nation. Rather let him meditate on the fact that while nations, as such, are under law, and will be rewarded or punished according to their obedience or disobedience, the Church of the redeemed is not under law, but under grace. Hence the difference of their codes, of their lives, and of their inheritance in the future.

As a branch of magistracy, war, when needful, is commanded; for cases continually occur in which, without it, the ruler cannot be a "terror to evil doers," or "a praise and reward to them that do well." Yet we are distinctly told, he is not to bear the sword in vain.

War cannot be helped: "for if civilized states will not study war, and stand in an offensive attitude, then, as heretofore, the barbarous people with which the earth

teems, allured on by the scent of prey, will come down upon them like the wolf upon the fold, and cast the world long centuries back into the dreary waste of ignorance and lawlessness. It is as vain to talk of peace and peace societies in the present dispensation, as to talk of a cloudless sky and an untempestuous sea. And it is vain to decry the calling of a soldier, as if it were not as necessary to the well-being of any State as the calling of a hunter and a husbandman: the first to bridle savage natures and arrest ambitious men; the second, to clear the woods and coverts of destructive creatures; and the third, to clear the earth of thorns and briars and bristly forests. These vain theories of a federal union of kingdoms to abolish war; and of the gradual influence of the people over their rulers preventing wars; and of the common interest which commerce engenders gradually making war to cease, are all vague and unsound, and based upon a false assumption, that man is able to alter the iron conditions into which the Fall has brought him, and in which the Almighty Will doth keep him till the Redeemer shall come to take possession of the purchased inheritance.”*

Again, Christian obligation to the poor, and the laws of political economy, can, as I think, never be altogether reconciled; since however sound these laws may be, *the economical end* is by them alone regarded, without taking account of its bearing upon the higher ends to which it should minister. Political economists, it must always be remembered, do not *make* the laws they expound; they simply give us a knowledge of those controlling influences, good or bad, moral or immoral, which regulate the production and distribution of those fruits of labour which support and humanize the life of man. They simply tell us, *as*

* Edward Irving on “Nature Worship—its Falseness.”

a fact, that by strict adherence to the laws of demand and supply, and by each man regarding his individual interest alone, whatever suffering may fall on the weak or unskilful, the general interests of the community will be best secured, and national wealth be most largely augmented.

When, therefore, they bid us, in the employment of labour, as in everything else, to look to our own interest exclusively, to buy, in all cases, in the cheapest, and to sell in the dearest market, they but lay before us the secret of material prosperity. But such a course is not Christian. The individual believer who listens to the voice of Christ must, at whatever cost, "look not on his own things only, but on the things of others;" he must do unto others as he would that they, if he were in their circumstances, should do unto him; he must put his shoulders under another's burdens, and he must bear (suffer by) the infirmities of the weak.

But he will very soon find, if he does so, that he cannot always either buy in the cheapest or sell in the dearest market; that he must be content to be sometimes regarded by his neighbours as a fool; and that he must not unfrequently suffer losses which others avoid. *To what extent* he is called upon to suffer must be decided by each Christian for himself under the light of the law of love. Whenever this is *honestly* done, it will probably not be found so difficult as might at first be supposed to find the point at which he may lawfully stop. Here, again, however, the wisdom and experience of other Christians is often needed as a guide, and a Church, rightly constituted, ought to furnish it, as a part of the education given to its younger members.

Let us apply the principle now laid down a little further. The necessities which arise out of competition in the

often altogether inconsistent with Christian love; yet, unless the pillars of national wealth are to be withdrawn, and society to be involved in ruin, the principle of competition must be sustained and acted upon. *How far*, under such a state of things, a Christian is called upon to modify his action, or to pursue a course different from that of others, is a question to which I do not profess to be able to give a satisfactory answer.

Again, men of business oftentimes insist—I do not undertake to say with what amount of truth—that it is impossible to succeed in life without more or less violating the law of righteousness. “No one,” says a recent writer of this class, “but those who have opportunities of getting behind the scenes in London, or in some other great commercial town, can have any idea of the *deceit* which is carried on. Many a respectable man of business would not tell a direct lie himself, but he will suffer those about him to do it wholesale, and *it is surprising how ready people are to lie on others’ behalf*. I have constantly to remind my servants that they have enough to do to answer for their own sins, without gratuitously adding to their number by lying, as they foolishly think, to serve me.”*

Mr Jowitt, with singular candour and frankness, says, nothing can be more certain than that “in daily life cases often occur in which we must do as other men do, and act upon a general understanding, *even though unable to reconcile a particular practice to the letter of truthfulness, or even to individual conscience*.” It is “hard,” he adds, “in such cases to lay down a general rule; but in general we should be suspicious of any conscientious scruples in which other *good men* do not share. We shall do right to make a large allowance for the perplexities and entanglements of human

* “Business Life; the Experiences of a London Tradesman:” Houlston & Co.

things ; we should observe that men of strong minds brush away our scruples."

That *many* Christian men reason in this way, although few may care to avow it, is unquestionable. And not without a certain amount of apparent justification. A *scrupulous* conscience is very seldom a healthy one. The opinions of *good* men, generally, *ought* to have much weight with us in the practical decisions of life. It is every way most *undesirable* to become isolated, and by any step, however conscientiously it may be taken, to disable ourselves from acting with bodies of Christian men, whom we cannot but love. Many a man, who sharply condemns this sort of casuistry in a clergyman, regularly acts upon it in business ; and many a devout woman, who habitually expresses her indignation at its influence over a tradesman, bows implicitly to its dictates when enforced in what she calls "good society."

The truth is, whether we recognize it or not, that the greater part of the morality practised day by day by all classes is *purely conventional*. We all shrink from adopting any course which seems to condemn others ; *sometimes*, like religious slave-owners, playing our pleasant deceptions off in the face of the plainest truths, and *always* forgetful that we are using an instrument subtle enough and elastic enough to accommodate practical life to any standard which may, at any period, happen to prevail in Christianized society. Thus it is man lowers the heavenly to the earthly ; and, whether a preacher or a hearer, too often contrives to depress the Divine law to that which he considers the absolute requirements of ordinary life.

The scepticism of the eighteenth century sprang up in a soil of this character ; that of the nineteenth, destined, I fear, to prove eventually more desolating than its prede-

cessor, *because connected with far more activity of mind, and a deeper earnestness in relation to life and its responsibilities,* can only be checked by an end being put to the strange contrasts between words and things which now so perplex men.

The true answer to all casuistry regarding obligation is, that Christ has recognized every difficulty and summed up his reply in the words, "Straight is the gate." Surely it is high time, as Mr. Ruskin tells us, that we ceased talking "as if our religion was good for show, but would not work," as if "the laws of the devil were the only practicable ones," as if "the laws of God were merely a form of poetical language." When shall we learn that "sixpences have to be lost, as well as lives, under a sense of *duty*; that the market may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit; and trade its heroisms as well as war?" When shall we perceive that the true distinction between the Church and the world is to be found, not in the diversity of their amusements, but in the *peculiarity of obedience* which marks the true disciple; in a line of conduct which, if it sometimes incapacitates for successful struggle in fields of worldly ambition, carries with it, as the reward of self-denial, a "crown," a "prize," a royal inheritance in the world that is to come?

Again, asceticism is not Christianity. On the contrary, it is, *as a principle*, opposed to that which is best. God gives us "richly to enjoy," and never asks us to give up anything, except that we may thereby be fitted to receive that which is far better. Even great riches may be lawfully acquired or inherited by a good man. Sometimes indeed it is difficult to avoid this prosperous termination of a life of industry, perseverance, and honourable skill. Nay, the *acquisition* of property may, and often does, call forth some most valuable qualities; its *possession*, again, brings

with it both mental and moral advantages; and its right *disposal* is to some men an important part of their probation. And yet every wise man knows that *the love of getting* is one of the greatest snares in life.

The same thing is true in relation to literature and art. To treat these things with contempt, or to regard them with dislike, as foes to spirituality of mind, is *mere narrowness*. It is simply to close the eye of the mind to what is going on around us, and to commit a folly not unlike that which would be perpetrated by a man who, for fear of the corrupting influences of what he might behold, should voluntarily deprive himself of sight. Yet those are striking words of Mr. Ruskin's—than whom no man, perhaps, ever lived who cared more for art, or has done more to make others care for it—"The more I have examined this subject, the more dangerous I have found it to dogmatize. One great fact first meets me. I cannot answer for the experience of others, but *I never yet met a Christian whose heart was thoroughly set upon the world to come, and, so far as human judgment could pronounce, perfect before God, who cared about art at all*. I have known several noble Christian men who loved it intensely, but in them there was always traceable some entanglement of the thoughts with the matters of this world, causing them to fall into strange distresses and doubts, and often leading them into what they themselves would confess to be errors in understanding, or even failures in duty. As a general fact, I have never known a man who seemed altogether right and calm in faith, who seriously cared about art."

Here too, and still more in connection with the literature of the day, is a field in which wise and *cultivated men* might by their counsels be of the greatest service to the ardent and inexperienced, were there but a platform from

which, without assumption and without personality, they might from time to time express convictions, *as God led them to feel for, and desire to help*, their younger brethren and sisters. From such, a word in season might to some be invaluable, were it only to remind them that all that is beautiful is not good ; and that "the sensation of beauty, not of necessity either sensual or intellectual, is dependent both for its truth and intensity on a pure, right, and open state of the heart."

"The glory of the terrestrial," writes the admirable author from whom I have so often quoted, "is one ; the glory of the celestial is another. The triumph of nature lies in the carrying out of its own will, in identification with some great object, in adhesion to some lofty aim. The triumph of Christ is placed in the subjugation of that very will, in acquiescence, in disentanglement, in the stretching forth of the hands, so that another may gird and carry us whither we would not. Does not every Christian's daily experience prove that the holding of the one thing needful involves the letting go of many things lovely and desirable, and that in thought as well as in action he must go on ever narrowing his way, *avoiding much?*"

We may not, she says, be worse than our fathers, but the fear is that "we have slipped, as a Christian people, into a position far below the one given us of God ; and that while we are ready enough to accuse ourselves of want of diligence in making our calling and election sure, it is by no means certain that we have as yet, in the words of the Apostle, *seen* our calling, and attained to a just appreciation of its hope and power. Of many things which have to do with the deeper and more intimate relations of the human soul with God, we willingly remain ignorant."

In relation to the *passive graces* especially we have

much to learn. "*These* are the miracles of the New Covenant. While many of the active virtues are merely the natural energies transfigured, and changed into a higher likeness,—the earthly made to bear the image of the heavenly,—these, 'unfed by nature's soil,' have their root in Christ, and in Him is their fruit found."*

Once more I say, *these* are the subjects on which Christians require guidance; a guidance which Churches *ought* to give, but do not, and as things are *cannot* give, for neither the Pulpit nor the Press can meet the necessities of the case.

The point to be looked at is, *the bearing* which a modified form of open ministry might be expected to have in the elevation of the Christian character. That it would accomplish much must not of course be *assumed*; experience alone can prove its value. But it may surely be hoped, that *if it worked at all* it would do something to form and to fix a higher Christian ideal than now prevails; that it would rescue the *peculiar moralities* of the Gospel from the conventionalisms which now choke them, while it would create and sustain *within the Christian body* a public opinion of its own,—a judgment of things which the world, however Christianized, will never accept, but which is nevertheless in strict accordance with the teaching of the Lord.

I have said, "if it worked at all," because I am anything but insensible to the enormous difficulties which would have to be overcome before any open ministry worthy of the name could be established. It could not be *tacked on* to existing arrangements. It could not be made to consist with services like those which now obtain among us. It must arise out of a deep and settled conviction that the

* The "Patience of Hope," by the author of "A Present Heaven."

perfecting of the believer is the one great object of the Christian ministry; that for this purpose the Bible was given (2 Tim. iii. 16), and that for this end chiefly, as we have already seen, were Churches called into existence.

Further, open ministry supposes a willingness on the part of Christian fellowships *to risk* much in the way of income, popularity, and standing in the world. It supposes *more than willingness* on the part of pastors to resign exclusive privilege, and to place themselves on a level with their brethren; for unless they diligently sought out and encouraged suitable persons to unite with them in teaching; unless they *pressed* the performance of the duty as a high Christian obligation; unless they themselves habitually kept as much as possible in the background; unless, in short, they earnestly *desired* the change, and were led to perceive that whatever trials might attend its introduction it would ultimately be as great a blessing to themselves as to their people, all attempts to establish it must end in failure.

Let obstacles to the working of open ministry, however, be what they may, it must not be forgotten, as Vinet well puts it, that "we can never fairly charge to a principle the difficulties and hindrances that attend a return to that principle if it has been long mistaken or forgotten; or if the contrary principle, organized long ago in society, has penetrated all its parts and modified all its elements."

That it *would be* a blessing to all, can scarcely be doubted. And to none more than to the faithful minister. For as things are, neither deacon nor elder, however willing they may be, can do much to relieve his toil, simply because people naturally wish to be consoled or advised by the man whose preaching has been made beneficial to them,—by the individual alone with whose mind and heart they have so often been brought into communion.

The extension of teaching would be the extension of this sympathy. Others beside the minister would then awaken sensibility and affection, and on this account be welcomed like himself in the hour of sorrow. One might be found specially acceptable to the poor of the flock; another to the young; a third to the aged,—gifts differing as of old,—and thus channels of usefulness now closed would open in a way calculated at one and the same time to relieve the pastor and to enrich the flock.

It is surely encouraging to find that, in our own day, so eminent a preacher and leader of men as Dr. Candlish should have said, even in reference to modern Brethrenism, that a system which should “set aside official distinctions in the Church (by which he means a system in which ministry should not be the exclusive work of one man), were it only practicable, would be the *beau ideal*, the perfection of Christian association and organization.” He tells us, “it is the necessity and *not the glory* of the Church on earth that she must have her office-bearers,” and he sustains their appointment only because he cannot rely, and thinks the Lord has not judged it safe to rely altogether on such a general and spontaneous alacrity and ability as that arrangement would imply.*

These admissions are invaluable. For surely it is reasonable to conclude that the system which is confessedly the best in the abstract,—“the *beau ideal*, the perfection of Christian organization,”—*might* be established if it were not discountenanced by a perverted public opinion, and *superseded* by ecclesiastical machinery, more favourable to natural indolence and selfishness; if weakness, the necessary consequence of existing methods, had not so largely

* “The Christian Sacrifice.” By Robert S. Candlish, D.D., p. 50.

supervened as to render any return to the old paths apparently impossible.

Perhaps all that can be done *at present* is to endeavour to excite a *willingness* to investigate; to enkindle, if it be possible, a disposition *to inquire*, not for what may be considered as most expedient, but for what is true; not for what may be regarded as most practicable, but for what God has sanctioned; to inquire, not in the hope of being able to graft here or there, on the old stock, some new device or other, but simply to ascertain what is right, and, when this is ascertained, to spread such conviction without reference *as yet* to anything beyond the propagation of true thought, since in no other way but by the growth of true thought can the interests of godliness ever be permanently advanced.

All *hasty* procedures in what is called a practical direction are both unpractical and evil, since they commonly proceed either from impatience or self-will. Not till right ideas have made considerable way, not till an atmosphere has been created in which new practices will work healthily, is it either wise or right to attempt their introduction. "Few persons, however,"—as has been well said by Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his admirable essay "On the Functions of Criticism,"—"and very few Englishmen indeed, can understand or appreciate such a course. The cry of the present day on all hands is CONSTRUCT. They who join in this cry forget that, for construction, 'two powers must concur—the power of the man, and the power of the moment.' He who is destined in the long run to accomplish most in the correction of the evils which now oppress us, is the man who is most willing to wait for suitable materials before he begins to build, or, if needful, to provide them for others; who is able to hold a truth firmly

without seeking to revolutionize the world with it; who is content to handle it *disinterestedly*, and without reference to any party objects whatever; who steadily refuses to lend himself to ulterior considerations; whose aim is first to know the best that can be known, and then to create, by the agency of this knowledge, a current of true and fresh ideas; the man, above all, who never ceases to protest with all his might against whatever makes truth subserve interests not its own; whatever stifles it with practical considerations; whatever makes practical ends the first thing, and true thought the second thing." If we are at once earnest and honest in such a course, we shall neither be deterred from investigation, nor turn away in despondency, because the path we have to pursue may be strewn with the wrecks or whitened by the bones of previous explorers.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

A MINISTRY of the Church may exist in one of three forms. It may arise out of *the necessities* of a particular time, such, for instance, as when Christians are scattered by persecution. It may, as a sort of after-growth, appear in the form of a supplement to a more regular and even "established" order of public worship. It may, in connection with a pastorate, become the life-blood of a community, *itself* the source and support of a true Christian vitality.

In the *first* of these forms it has often appeared. The Rev. Dr. Hanna, in a sketch of the early history of Protestantism in France, found in his useful volume on "Wycliffe and the Huguenots," calls the period of Protestantism in which it existed the "*age of purity*." The "reformed," he says, "had as yet no organization, civil or ecclesiastical; they had no church, no creed, no fixed form of worship. They had entered into no political alliance with any party in the state. It was a quiet, hidden movement in the hearts of men thirsting for religious truth, for peace of conscience, for purity of heart and life. They sought each other out, and met to help each other on. But it was in small bands, in closets with closed doors, in the murky lanes of the city, in the lonely hut of the wayside, in the gorge of the mountain, in the heart of the forest, that they met to study the Scriptures together, to

praise and to pray. They did so at the peril of their lives; and the greatness of the peril guarded the purity of the motive. *Ordinarily they had no educated ministry.*"

In the *second* form a Church ministry obtains to this day in Wurtemberg. In that kingdom, for nearly 260 years, an institution, if it may be so called, has existed of a very peculiar character, viz., meetings of the laity on the sabbath and otherwise for reading the Scriptures and prayer.

Out of the thousand parishes into which Wurtemberg is divided, the large proportion have such meetings. In the city of Stuttgart there are three distinct assemblies of this character. When the late Sir Culling Eardley visited one of them, he tells us that at least 200 persons were in the room. The meeting was presided over by a venerable man of the middle class, who was surrounded at a higher table by from fifteen to twenty of the most respected Christians of the place. "*This*," said a clergyman who had accompanied him to the meeting, "*is the true Church of Wurtemberg, and the blessing of it to the country cannot be over-estimated.*"

Prelate von Kapff, of Stuttgart, thus spoke of these meetings at the conference of the Evangelical Alliance, held at Berlin in 1857:—"You will be astonished," said he, addressing the assembled clergy, "when you hear how *simple peasants, journeymen, tradesmen, and officials expound the Word of God*, communicate their experience, and edify one another. This I believe is the external appearing of the universal priesthood; and I can only beg the brethren who are pastors to promote such private meetings in their flocks, and strive in such assemblies to *educate* a people who shall be independent and of full age, who can exercise these glorious functions; a people that is not dependent upon us; whom we esteem as fellow-workers

in the vineyard of the Lord, and of whom *we may learn*. I confess here that *I have learnt* in such assemblies a theology which was an essential addition to that which I brought with me from the University. It has often very much quickened me, when I have heard from the mouth of a peasant or a journeyman things which I have certainly known before, but which, *as an experience*, have warmed my heart within me, and suggested new thoughts."

The *third* form is that which I am now anxious to promote. Allow me then, my reader, with this object, to recapitulate what I have advanced, in order that *the ground* I take may be more clearly seen, and the *logical connection* of the chapters be more distinctly appreciated. No *part* of what I have said will be understood if the idea, *as a whole*, is not grasped.

I commenced by observing that the great peculiarity of the Primitive Church was the entire absence in it of any organization *for aggressive purposes*; that the work of evangelization was never entrusted to any man without his being gifted with special power to fulfil it; that the apostle Paul repeatedly asserts that the command of the Lord, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," *had been fulfilled* in his day, and it is clear that both he and the other apostles, with the Church as a whole, lived and died in the belief that the Lord Jesus would very shortly appear in the clouds of heaven, and take unto Himself the kingdom.

I then noticed the fact that after the death of the last of the apostles a great change came over the Church in relation both to its beliefs and methods of action; that the expectation of the immediate return of Christ then passed away, and was succeeded by the conviction that it was the purpose of God, by the sanctification of human talent, and by the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit, eventually

and speedily to subdue the world to the Redeemer; that in the strength of this conviction the ancient Church organized, framed a theology, allowed power of all kinds to centre in a clergy, and finally, by these means, overthrew Paganism and conquered the Empire.

It was then observed that the Roman Catholic Church of our own day is the inheritor of this ecclesiastical system and of the principles it embodies; the chief of which is that the Church's first obligation to Christ is the conversion of the world, at least to the full extent that human instrumentality can effect it.

I have maintained that this is not the case; but that while it is the duty of every believing man to spread Christianity *in the way appointed*, God has not devolved upon the Church, either Romish or Reformed, or in any way made dependent on human effort, the salvation of others. I have given somewhat at length *nine* distinct reasons for coming to so unusual a conclusion, and I have replied to what I have supposed would be the kind of remonstrance that might be offered by those who differ from me.

Proceeding with this line of thought I have endeavoured to show what is the precise relation God intended the Bible to have to an ungodly world, and what the true idea of the Christian ministry.

I have regarded ministry as of two kinds, viz., *to* the world, and *for* the Church,—*the first* to be accomplished by the evangelist or preacher of the Gospel, acting independently of all Church organization, and separating his message from the Christian privilege involved in prayer and praise; *the last* to have for its sole aim *the perfecting of the saints*.

For the accomplishment of this great end I have attempted to show that the pulpit is not sufficient; that

the exclusive ministry of a pastor, however devoted he may be, is not enough; but that it must be accompanied by the ministry of the Church itself,—by that *mutual instruction* under which alone adults can be educated for the work God has given them to do.

I have endeavoured to show that in attempting to carry out this order of things we are but following the apostolic pattern; that our influence for good on others will always be in proportion to our own faith and love, to the *magnetic power* that goes forth from us, and attracts to us the careless and the wavering; that a modified and well-regulated open ministry, accompanied by a revival of the Apostolic Pastorate, would be likely to promote a wider and truer communion of all believers than is yet possible,—to prevent much of that casting of pearls before swine which is now so common, and to meet better than anything else the exigencies of the day in which we live. Objections of various kinds have been answered as they have arisen.

The intellectual enlargement of the children of God, and their moral development by the formation of a *truer and more perfect ideal* of the Divine life than that which as yet prevails amongst us, and by the cultivation of graces now frequently cast into the shade, would, I believe, be the certain result of the change, *if only* Christian fellowships were willing to risk the loss of income and of status which might, for a time at least, have to be endured, and *if pastors* could be brought to see that in resigning exclusive privileges, and in diligently searching for and encouraging suitable persons to unite with them in ministry, they were laying the foundation of future peace and blessedness, and helping on the true kingdom of the Lord.

In conclusion, I have referred to some of the forms in which an open ministry *has worked* with the happiest re-

sults, and I have now only to add a few additional considerations which, pressing on my own mind, seem to ask for utterance.

I repeat, then, that *to me* the Bible clearly teaches that *beyond* the exercise of that kind of influence which goes forth from every godly man who adorns his profession ; beyond the general proclamation of the great facts of the Gospel both at home and abroad *in witness* ; and beyond imparting to the poor, benefits which have well been termed "the dues of humanity," the Saviour does not commit to Christians, *even instrumentally*, the salvation of their fellows ; that while it is *their* imperative duty to do all they can to commend the Gospel to others by exhibiting its fruits, and to welcome all who seek acquaintance with it, He reserves the great work of the world's subjection in His own hands ; that He performs it only by the Divine power He possesses ; and that He does this, in all ages, in accordance with a sovereignty which, although we may not be able to understand it, is identical with love, and therefore *best* for the creature.

It is needful that we should see this, or we shall fail to perceive that our call is *to be*, rather than *to do* ; that, *being* what we ought to be, there will be little danger of our failing *to do* what we are called upon to perform ; that truth, rather than triumph, should be the great object of our ambition ; that God loves His creatures far better than we can do ; that *acquiescence* in His dispensations, founded on implicit confidence in the revelation He has been pleased to make of Himself to us, is far more acceptable than restless zeal for the promotion of His kingdom ; that the simple acceptance of that great body of FACTS which it has pleased Him to give for our learning, is far better than any amount of theological deduction that may be drawn therefrom ; that

all noise and clamour on behalf of One who when on earth did neither strive nor cry, nor make His voice to be heard in the streets, is out of place; that all pandering to human vanity, all love of notoriety, all planning, and directing, and governing of machinery, all greed of money for God's service, all excitement and publicity, all faith in mere oratory, all silencing of witness, lest it should interfere with our projects,—*everything*, in short, which is contrary to calm trust, to childlike faith, to the silent and loving operations of the Spirit, "is not of the Father, but of the world."

The full and hearty recognition of these truths would, I am persuaded, do more to purify the Church, to renovate society, to enlarge the boundaries of Divine knowledge, to increase true godliness, and so to hasten the coming of the Lord, than the dedication of millions of money to religious societies, or any conceivable multiplication of churches and preachers, of Bibles, of tracts, or of missionaries.

The great question with each of us would then be, not so much, What can I do? as What can I become? *Not*, How can I add agency to agency? but, What is the order in which a Christian should work? What *the nature of the power* he is called upon to exercise? What *the means* God has appointed for perfecting the character, and through that, for extending the faith? How can I best harmonize my practice with the daily petition, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"?

Whenever these inquiries are faithfully entered upon, and honestly pursued, many changes will come over our opinions and feelings. Relieved from the ever-pressing but hopeless endeavour to do what man can never accomplish, and from the error by which this restlessness is supposed to be justified, viz., the belief that there will be no restitution, properly so called, and that, therefore, all who pass out of

life unconverted are lost for ever, Scripture will be searched with new and intense interest to discover,—(1) What God has revealed in relation to *our* duty and *His* purposes; (2) What is our true position in the dispensation under which our lot is cast; and (3) Wherein we have erred in judgment, and wherein we may have unconsciously fallen under the fatal shadow of “the mystery of iniquity.”

It will then be seen how it comes to pass that, after 1,800 years of existence, Christianity is what it is; that after at least two generations of extended and unceasing missionary effort, both at home and abroad; after the circulation of *eighty millions* of copies of the Scriptures, in whole or in part, and after the distribution of above *fifty millions* of tracts, the results should comparatively be so meagre and unsatisfactory; that on the Continent of Europe, Protestantism, instead of advancing, should have retrograded; that infidelity should be on the increase; that mere religiousness should have so widely taken the place of pure and undefiled religion; that ritualism and sacred music, choral services and scenic effects, should still be so popular among persons not altogether destitute of spirituality; that the Book of God should be so little studied; that difficulties in relation to its inspiration and authority should multiply upon us; that its exposition should be so varied and uncertain; that unfulfilled prophecy should be so greatly slighted, or so much abused; that devoutness should so greatly supersede true piety; that books of prayer and meditation, hymnals, and religious services, breathing in every page the spirit of mediæval superstition, should by so many be preferred to the healthy atmosphere of the Bible; that the Church should so largely occupy the place of Christ, and that communion *there* should so often quiet cravings intended to find their satisfaction only in the

fellowship of saints and the communion of the Holy Ghost.

Meditating on these things at the source of all truth, humbled, mortified, and penitent, we might, it is to be hoped, then seek, under Divine guidance, to occupy the position of the Primitive and Apostolic Church, and to wait, with our "loins girt," and our "lamps burning," for the great changes which, as so many thoughtful readers of prophecy think, now impend over us ; ready for whatever Providence may have in store for the Church, whether it be light or dark ; independent, in the best sense, of much that now constitutes our stay and hope ; and assured that if, as experience has often taught us, Divine truth is never so weak as when it walks through the earth in pomp and pride, and never so strong as when it is crushed and persecuted, patient and penniless, the coming time, should it be, as many anticipate, one of apparent discomfiture,—should it bring in its train, as many fear it will, the overthrow of righteousness and the triumph of an intolerant Atheism, will yet be pregnant with untold blessings, if it drives us from our dependence on organized Christianity to reliance on God only ; if it substitutes "the Church in the house" for the crowded congregation ; if it sends us from theology to Scripture, from man to God, from sight to faith, from the outward to the inward, from controversy to character, from the flesh to the spirit, from everything else to Christ.

In the meantime, it can scarcely be inappropriate to ask, in what direction, humanly speaking, help is most likely to come. Is it from the Church of England, or is it from the Nonconformists, that we may hope for aid in the struggle ? What, so far as we can perceive, is the part allotted to each in the great controversy that is approaching ?

The answer will be found, if found at all, in the constitution of these bodies, in the idea they are supposed to express. And here they are seen to be directly contrary the one to the other.

According to Hooker, the Church of England, as by law established, is one body, the essential unity of which consists in; and is known by, an external profession of Christianity, *without regard in any respect had, to the moral virtues or spiritual graces of any member of that body.*

With this, Warburton and Coleridge in general terms agree; and the words of the Nineteenth Article, though apparently of a more restricted import, may be presumed not to mean less.

“According to Coleridge, the National Church is a public and visible community, having ministers whom the nation, through the agency of a constitution, hath created trustees of a reserved national fund, upon fixed terms and with defined duties, and whom, in case of breach of those terms, or dereliction of those duties, the nation, through the same agency, may discharge.

“The funds set apart by the nation for the support of the National Church are now, *in fact*, received by the ministers of the Church of Christ in this country. True; but according to the idea—and that idea involves a history and a prophecy of the truth—it is not because they are *such* ministers that they receive those funds, but because, being now the only representatives, as formerly the principal constituents, of the national clerisy or Church, they alone have a commission to carry on the work of national cultivation on national grounds,—transmitting and integrating all that the separate professions have achieved in science or art,—but with a range transcending the limits of professional views, or local or temporary interests, applying the product,

simple and defecated, to the strengthening and subliming of the moral life of the nation itself."

"Such a Church is a principal instrument of the Divine Providence in the institution and government of human society. *But it is not that Church against which we know that hell shall not prevail.*"

These striking observations, made by Mr. Henry Nelson Coleridge in his preface to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's work "On the Constitution of the Church and State, according to the idea of each," are valuable chiefly on account of the distinction they draw between the Church of Christ, regarded as such, and the national clerisy which may at any time be established in England for the purpose of promoting the general moral cultivation of her people.

The evils of which so many complain as attaching to the Church of England; the dangers which from time to time arise from theological defections within its borders; the controversies which are ever raging in relation to its value or worthlessness, almost always proceed on the supposition that it is to be regarded at one and the same time as the Church of Christ and the Church of the nation,—a great national missionary institution, in fact, for converting sinners and building up believers. That it is frequently an agency blessed of God to accomplish both these ends may thankfully be admitted; but it is so, not by virtue of its constitution, but by what may be termed the happy accident which has placed its direction so largely in the hands of men who love the Gospel, and which has endowed it with a clergy so pious, disinterested, and laborious as so many of those are who do the work of the Church of England.

So long as this continues to be the case, the distinction drawn by Mr. Coleridge, however important, will not gene-

rally be recognized. Should the Church of England, however, ever become thoroughly rationalistic, it may remain as the national and ancestral church of our land, but it will be felt then to be very distinguishable from the Church of Christ, and true piety will again return to seek and to find elsewhere, or in the bosom of the family, a refuge and a stay which can no longer be found in the Establishment.

The Church of England, then, being by constitution what it is, *could not*, even if it were wished, raise up *within its own bosom* the sort of ministry which I think the apostolic churches had, and we need.

The Nonconformist bodies, originating for the most part in secession from the national establishment, and professing to realize a higher and purer communion,—untrammelled by the State, and free to act according to the dictates of conscience,—have no hindrance to contend with beyond that which arises from their own public opinion leading them to attempt, so far as their ability extends, *the very same work* which the Church of England is ever trying to do, viz., to *Christianize the community*, by promoting a mixed worship, and by spreading as far as they can the knowledge of God, through public preaching, the visitation of the poor, and such other means as may seem likely to answer the end. Their main object, indeed, seems to be to prove that they can do this work *better* than the Church of England; that voluntary societies are for Christian purposes preferable to endowed agencies; that the support of the State in such work is unfavourable to purity, to freedom, and to vigour.

But is this their calling of God? Has it not led, and is it not sure to lead, just in proportion as equality makes way, to all the evils that beset established communions? to the recognition of a professional order of religious teach-

ers, and to the love of power and of social and political influence, so far as it can be obtained, either by popular speech, or by ecclesiastical organization? I think *it does*, and must continue to do so while human nature is unchanged. Is not this tendency increasingly visible in rivalries of various kinds? in Gothic buildings, in expensive edifices, in steeples, in desires for liturgical services, in chants, in artistic singing, in the use of organs, in ritualistic tastes, in decorations, in altar-cloths over communion tables, and in a growing dislike to, and contempt for, all notions that are anti-clerical?

Changes are clearly coming over us, the direction and extent of which few care to contemplate; and perhaps nothing now can stay their course. That *preaching*, from some cause or other, is *going down* in public estimation must, I fear, be admitted. That in exactly the same proportion a love of ritualism is rising up seems little less certain. Nor can it be otherwise if our existing church and chapel system is right in principle; for a mixed crowd or congregation can only be kept together and interested in one of two ways,—either by oratory or by ritualism. If preaching fall into disrepute, nothing will retain the multitude but some æsthetic form of worship. If the ear be not regaled, the eye must be attracted. If the intellect be not addressed, the senses must.

I am not, of course, imagining that preaching will, in any case, be given up, for even in the Romish Church it is a wonderful element of power. I am merely intimating my belief that *the tendency of the time* is to get away from the Presbyterian idea, which regards the church as mainly, if not exclusively, a place of theological instruction; and to get nearer to the Anglican idea, which regards the pulpit as altogether subordinate to the altar. As a consequence,

while what is popularly, although inappropriately, called Puseyism spreads among Episcopalians, the opinion deepens and widens among Nonconformists that in public service *more prominence* should be given to the worship of the Church, and less to its teaching.

I do not wonder at this. It but expresses the natural want of many spiritually minded Christians. But let it not be forgotten, that to have spiritual worship you must have spiritual worshippers; that to the outside world, to the formal and the irreligious, who form so large a part of ordinary congregations, the strengthening of the worshipping element *means* the exaltation of ritualism, *and nothing else*.

What, then, must we do? Our choice clearly lies between *moving forward* on the line so many are now following, or *stepping backward* to an extent which will altogether change our position in the eye of the world, and call for no little sacrifice and self-denial.

This, however, is the path I invite the Nonconformists of England to tread, and to tread it boldly, without distinction of sect or party, regardless of trust-deeds, of denominational interests, of property, of everything that keeps real Christians apart from each other; regardless, too, of theological opinions, whether right or wrong; of the views of Baptists or Pædobaptists, of Calvinists or Arminians, regardless of all creeds and confessions save one—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" merging all other considerations in the one cardinal qualification for fellowship—faith in the Divine Redeemer, and earnest desire to know and do His will. Then would the song, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ!" rise to heaven with new acceptance, since it would swallow up every other cry, and embody in its capacious bosom the spoils of the theological universe.

A Nonconformity of this character would be worth any sacrifice that might be required for its support, since it would be neither a badge of party nor a rock of offence to other Christians, but simply *a higher school* for advancement in the Divine life. This is its true mission in England, if it has one. Its calling is to take up the Christian where the Church of England, or the general congregation, leaves him, and to bring him forward in all knowledge and godliness. Doing this in Christ's own spirit, separate from the world, yet as open in its communion as in its prayers, it surely would command *the respect* of all who recognize the spirituality of true worship, whatever might be their ecclesiastical prejudices or preferences.

Separated by an impassable gulf from political aims, it would neither excite anger nor occasion dread. Without any organization capable of being turned to worldly ends, or to the acquisition of power; recognizing no order of men as exclusively commissioned to teach; and acknowledging no one ordinance as more sacred than another,—it would be at once a standing witness against Romanizing of all degrees, and a silent rebuke to sectarian ambitions.

Aspiring to no distinction beyond that of being a suitable channel for the development of spiritual Christianity, and a means well adapted to promote the cultivation of the higher forms of the Divine life, it would soon come to be regarded as standing apart from all denominational or party associations; and if, as would certainly be the case, growth in goodness manifested itself in desires to benefit others, those desires would become acts, only in subordination to Divine appointments, and whether carried out individually or in combination with others, would be marked by that character of quiet unobtrusiveness which becomes all who seek to follow the footsteps of the Master.

Nothing is more certain than that until the Church awakes to *judgment of itself*, will secessions, greater or smaller, *originating* in felt wants, and therefore drawing in their wake some of the best, the most single-hearted, and the most godly amongst us, from time to time first *witness* against that which is wrong, and then *wither* by becoming wrong in the very act of witness; wither, by becoming narrow, bigoted, and uncharitable, first claiming the right of *judging* those who differ from them, and then exercising the right in still fiercer judgments on one another.

It is a mercy for which we can never be too thankful that separations, *as such*, can never be more than partial, and rarely other than sectarian; that individualism, however valuable in correcting popular opinions, or in laying bare cherished evils, can build no temple to its own glory, or sever Christian from Christian without finding its punishment in its sin. But equally true is it that God will judge the Church that refuses to listen to any voice that is not in accordance with its own—that rejects remonstrance, whether from within or from without; for self-complacency and spiritual pride may influence a body as much as an individual, and worldly interests are not less worldly because supposed to be employed in the service of the Most High.

One word more and I have done. Is there a Christian man, worthy of the name, who knows nothing of that irrepressible sadness which so often steals over the spirit as we become more and more conscious how far, as individuals, we fall short of that high calling which is presented to us alike in Scripture and in the depths of our own consciousness? Is there one who would not reject, almost with indignation, the pretence that our noblest aspirations are the mere offspring of discontent—that to soar above the

earth is vain—that to strive after perfection is to weary oneself for nought?

Why, then, should such persons think they do well to be angry, when the same order of thought is confronted with the Church and its institutions? Why should men *welcome* the suggestion that to doubt *its* condition is but to indicate a cynical spirit—to be a fault-finder, dissatisfied, unthankful? If it be not right to take complacency in what we individually are, is it otherwise than unlawful to glorify what we call “the Church,” by which I mean *that particular ecclesiastical organization* or institution which we most favour? Is it permissible to magnify its work, to exaggerate its value, to be so jealous regarding it, as on no account to allow it to be touched? Is it right to regard it as a thing too sacred to be questioned, too heavenly to be reformed? Here, too, if we will believe it, there is room for a Divine sadness.

The question proposed in my title-page—“Organized Christianity: Is it of God or of man?”—admits, now, of a distinct answer. *It is not of God, but of man.* Such organization is indeed of God to the extent in which it may be essential to the existence of Christian societies, but no farther. It is of man so far as it takes the form of a hierarchy or of a confederation of fellowships, whether governed *as a whole* by bishops or presbyters, or whether the fellowships in question be independent of each other, and only associated for general purposes. Let the form be what it may, in so far as Christianity presents itself before the world as an organized body, it becomes something different from the idea of Christ and His apostles.

Spiritually, the Church may be, and undoubtedly is, one great undivided family; but *visibly* it is a multitude of

families, existing like ordinary families, each independent of the other, without cohesion, and presenting no united front to the world. Christianity is not A POWER in the earth, making itself felt, even for good, by means of a well-appointed order of agencies. It is simply AN INFLUENCE—a Divine, purifying, enlightening, and sanctifying influence, intended to mingle silently, and often imperceptibly, with every form of human life, but not presenting externally any *point d'appui*, or any conglomeration capable of being either measured or counted.

Viewed as a unity, the Church is purely spiritual, having no Government of its own, because it is intended to harmonize with and to sanctify *all forms* of secular government. It has, in this aspect, no external shape, because its power is intended to be everywhere *felt*, rather than seen. It is to act like the air of heaven, blowing where God listeth, but no man being able to tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. That which Christianity is in each individual subject of it, such it is when regarded as a whole—A LIFE IN A LIFE; not any one form of life capable of being analyzed and separated from other forms of being, but a life "*hid* with Christ in God," seen only in its results, known only by its effects.

For the promotion of what is now called Christian civilization, whether at home or abroad, systematic aggressive action through churches and chapels, by parties and denominations, by priests and preachers, by ritualism and oratory, by money and machinery, seems to be indispensable. The statesman recognizes this when, viewing religion merely as a sort of moral police, he either sustains one particular form of faith, or protects and patronizes all. In the earlier stages of a community, rival sects, untrammelled by any authority external to themselves, inflaming each other's

zeal, and contending sharply for mastery over mind, best serve this great social end. It is only when some one sect has, from whatever cause, accumulated wealth and acquired spiritual dominion over the rich as well as over the poor, over the rank and intellect as well as over the ignorance of a community, that sound policy demands that such a body should be a *recognized* power, and should receive, in connection with wholesome control, some special status and honour from the Crown. Whenever this takes place, some one or more Christian body becomes the Established Church or Churches of the land—a procedure which, in process of time is almost sure to be regarded as a political necessity.

In this form, every country in Europe has been accustomed to hold up its Church as no unimportant part of its national glory and strength. But, as Mr. Henry Nelson Coleridge has so truthfully remarked, *These are not the Churches against which we know that hell shall not prevail.*

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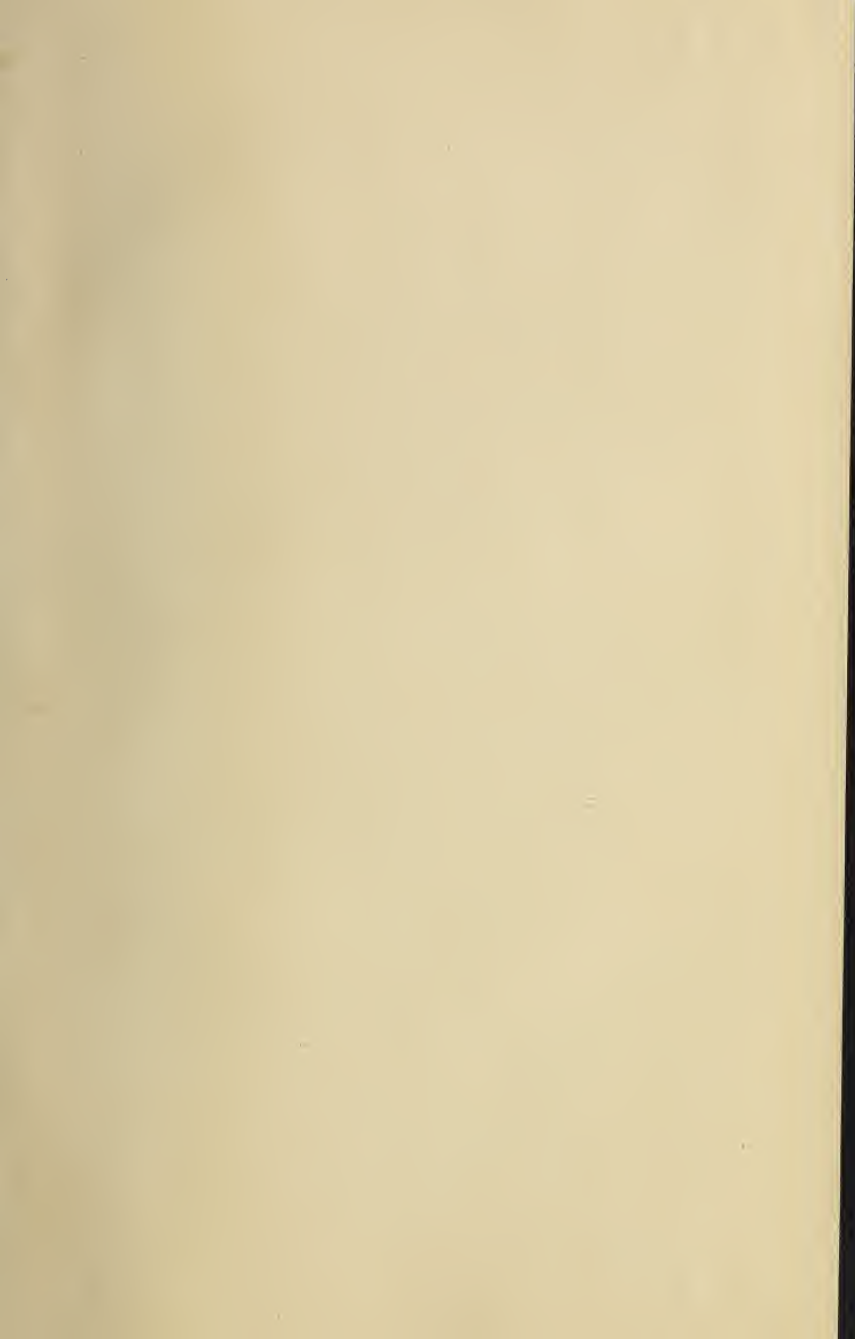
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